HIS RISE TO POWER

HENRY RUSSELL MILLER

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"Why didn't you take me—in spite of myself!"

HIS RISE TO POWER

By

HENRY RUSSELL MILLER

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THE MAN HIGHER UP

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

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HIS RISE TO POWER

BOOK ONE

A VOICE FROM THE WILDERNESS

HIS RISE TO POWER

CHAPTER I

MISTS OF THE MORNING

IT was twilight still in the valley, but over the hills to the east the sky was whitening. A young man sitting by his window turned to see the birth of another day. Throughout the night he had been staring at a vision. But weariness had set no mark upon him. His vision he did not understand, save that for him it spelled Opportunity — a chance to put into a drifting, rather ordinary existence, purposeful action, to stretch his muscles, rack his brain and tear his soul in the struggle that is the life of men. He was thirty years old, imaginative and enthusiastic; the fascination of the unknown caught him. With the prodigal courage of youth he burned to begin the struggle, to test his untried strength. His fine face, sensitive to the play of inner emotion, lighted up eagerly. A premonitory thrill passed over him. He had the feeling that in this new day something big, portentous, transforming, awaited him. He watched until the vague black mass looming before him took form as the blue-green hills that he knew.

"Like order coming out of chaos."

He caught up a rough towel and stealing quietly out of the house walked rapidly down the street. When the straggling town lay behind him, he broke into a slow trot, padding along over the road with its velvety layer of mist-laid dust, until he was breathing heavily and the sweat had started. At a place where many feet had worn a path across a clover meadow he turned from the road. The path ended at a clump of bushes on the river bank where the shallow Weehannock, suddenly deepening, had formed a swimming-hole for generations of youths.

Hastily undressing, he plunged into the green depths from which June had not quite taken the chill of spring. His lithe, strong body responded to the shock; the nerves, harried by the long night watch, relaxed; he shouted lustily. For a few minutes he swam vigorously, diving and turning somersaults, frolicsome as a school-boy, reveling in his strength and skill; then he turned on his back and floated with the lazy current until little shivers began to ripple over him. Reaching the shore, he took the towel and rubbed himself into a glow. He tingled with a sense of well-being.

When he was dressed again, refreshed and eager for his day, he took the path back to the highway. The sun was climbing over the hills. He stopped and watched it while it swung clear in the sky, gleaming a fiery red through the mists of the valley. A gentle breeze sprang up and sent the gray vapor streaming and billowing away into nothingness. The red of the sun became the hot, white blaze of molten iron. The glory of the morning was complete.

He was about to resume his tramp homeward when he beheld a strange procession advancing along the road, a young woman leading a limping horse. As she came nearer, he chuckled aloud. The handsome pigskin saddle, the ivory-handled crop, the modish riding-suit and boots were not the equipment with which young ladies of New Chelsea were wont to ride; the hat was of the sort seen thereabouts only as the crowning glory of the circus equestrienne. But for the matter of that, feminine New Chelsea had not the habit of matutinal exercise.

She heard him and looked up coldly; the chuckle died instantly.

"Good morning," he said. "What's the matter with your horse? Can I help you?"

She stopped. "He has picked up a stone," she answered, "and I can't get it out. If you will be so good —"

He vaulted lightly over the fence that bounded the meadow and tried to remove the offending stone with his fingers. This method proving ineffective, he went to a near-by tree and broke off a branch, the thick end of which he whittled into a rude sort of wedge. With this primitive implement he quickly abstracted the stone. The horse, a splendid chestnut, pawed the ground gingerly with the hurt foot.

"Thank you," the young woman said.

"You're quite welcome," he answered. "I'm always glad to help beauty in distress. He is a beautiful animal, isn't he?" he added hastily.

"Are you chaffing me?" she asked coldly.

He repressed a smile. "By no means! Better not ride him for a little bit, until we see how he walks."

She resumed her walk, leading the horse, which still limped slightly. The young man kept pace with her.

"You ride early," he ventured.

"No earlier than you — swim," she replied briefly, glancing at his wet hair and towel. He at once became uncomfortably conscious of his rather unkempt appearance.

"Are you staying in New Chelsea?"

"Yes."

"Surely not at the hotel!"

"No."

"Shall you stay long?"

"Are you in the habit of cross-examining strangers on the road?" she inquired frigidly.

He reddened. "I beg your pardon," he said, and slackened his pace to let her draw ahead.

A hundred yards farther on she stopped and waited for him to overtake her. He thought he detected an amused gleam in her eyes and the red deepened. But the twinkle died instantly.

"I think I'll ride now," she said, "if you will help me up. Crusader has stopped limping."

He held out his hand, she placed a foot in it and was lifted to the saddle. She murmured her thanks. But, although she gathered in the reins, she did not start away. For a moment she sat looking at the hills, apparently oblivious of the young man's presence. He wondered who she was, this well-tailored, well-cared for, well-poised young lady who had so suddenly appeared out of the mists of the morning, exuding amid the place and hour an air of artificial

luxury — and yet, oddly enough, without seeming wholly incongruous.

"If it weren't for that absurd hat!" he sighed inwardly.

He ventured again. "Why do you call him Crusader?"

She looked down at him. "Another question? You are incorrigible."

"I beg your pardon," he said again stiffly. And marched up the road.

"I have named him that," she called after him, "because he has plenty of fire and spirit, but at critical times seems to lack common sense." She laughed, a free, musical laugh that somehow recalled the blood to his cheeks. He made no reply.

She watched him as he swung along, frankly admiring the tall, cleanly-built figure whose lines the loose coat he wore did not conceal. She remembered the end of the big game eight years before, when a laughing, mud-stained young athlete tore himself away from his idolatrous companions to lay his triumph at the feet of the day's sweetheart. She remembered also, with a smile, the stabbing childish jealousy with which a freckle-faced, short-skirted girl had witnessed his devotion.

"And you're still here, buried alive in this out-of-the-way corner of the world," she said softly. "O, John Dunmeade! John Dunmeade!"

Suddenly she touched her horse with the crop. He bounded forward and clattered along until the young man was overtaken. She pulled Crusader down to a walk, at which the young man looked up astonished.

"You left in quite a hurry," she said demurely. "I suppose you're getting hungry, aren't you?"

"I never care to be snubbed more than twice before breakfast," he answered dryly.

"Oh! Did I snub you?"

"I was under that impression."

"But confess," she urged, "you were about to comment on the beauty of the morning."

"Do you think you are the only one who can really enjoy the sunrise?" he retorted. Then he laughed, "But I was rather — banal, wasn't I?"

She nodded. "It's a horrid word — but I'm afraid you were."

Curious as to her identity, but fearing another reproof, he cautiously refrained from further speech.

They went along in silence, until they reached a point where the undulating road rose to command a view of the valley to the south and the town to the north. She reined in her horse.

"What a pity one can't find words for such a morning! And the wonder of it is that it has recurred we don't know how many millions of times, always glorious."

"It makes one feel a bit — reverent —"

"— and at the same time uplifted —"

"— and small," he concluded. "What a jumble of emotions!"

"I hate to feel small, but it's true. One realizes as at no other time that the great fundamental forces are eternally at work. One feels as helpless as —" She paused for lack of a comparison.

"As helpless as some chick will soon feel, unless the farmer's dog scares off that hawk," he completed

the sentence for her, pointing. Over a barnyard in the valley the big bird was soaring in narrowing, lowering circles. From beneath came faintly the cries of frightened fowls. Suddenly the hawk swooped low to the earth. Scarcely pausing, it soared aloft once more, leaving panic in the barnyard and one chick the less.

The young woman laughed. "There's an illustration of one fundamental law."

"The supremacy of the strong? That's an old theory, I know. A very pretty one — from the point of view of the hawk. But how about the chick?"

"O, if one is born a chick —" She concluded the sentence with a shrug of her shoulders.

He looked up at her curiously. "You are frank."

"Isn't that what the hawk's strength is for?" she demanded.

"I suppose it is."

"Strength," she declared sagely, "is the most splendid thing in life."

"That depends on how it is used, doesn't it?"

"It doesn't depend. Strength is its own law. Hasn't the world always been conquered and ruled by its strong?"

"I'm afraid that is true," he said soberly.

"Afraid! I should think you would be glad, since — I have it from the New Chelsea *Globe* — you are a strong man."

He looked his astonishment. "You know who I am!"

"Of course! Did you think, Mr. Dunmeade," she laughed, "did you think your charms outweighed the conventions? I am not a barbarian, in the habit of

philosophizing with strange young men on the road before seven o'clock in the morning."

"What did you read in the *Globe?*"

"The vanity of men! I read, 'Mr. Dunmeade will undoubtedly make a strong candidate. The entire county wants him. It will have him.' It reads like a patent medicine advertisement, doesn't it? How does it feel to be wanted by an entire county, Mr. Dunmeade?"

"It is," he confessed, "rather pleasant — if true. Who are you?"

And suddenly, with a laugh, she was gone, amid a clatter of hoofs. He followed her admiringly with his eyes, as her horse sped with its burden along the road, until at the edge of the town they disappeared under the arching trees of the street.

"Well, now, if that isn't funny!" he exclaimed. He laughed, for no particular reason, from sheer exuberance of spirits.

He resumed his tramp, head high, drinking in the glory of the morning, thrilling with the joy of life and the vigor of body which a sleepless night could not impair.

Once, aloud, he addressed the morning. "She said I am strong. I wonder, am I strong — strong enough?"

And, searching his soul for the answer, he heard no negative.

CHAPTER II

MIRAGE IN THE DESERT

THIS chronicle, we neglected to state, begins at the beginning of the end of an epoch. The epoch has been variously styled a golden age, a period of prosperity, an era of expansion. It was all of that — to a few. For others — though they did not see it — it was a recession, a truce in the struggle, old as life itself, between the many and the strong.

But at that time no one, perhaps least of all William Murchell, dreamed that the historic period, in the shaping of which he had had a more than casual hand, was drawing to a close. Certain gentlemen, it is true, were secretly trying to destroy his power; but they entertained no wish to disturb the serene course of history.

William Murchell was a distinguished member of a class whose climbing proclivities are not subdued by the incident of a lowly start. He was born in the obscure hill town of New Chelsea, soon after Andrew Jackson and his contemporaries promulgated and illustrated the immortal doctrine, "To the victor belong the spoils." Left an orphan at the tender age of fourteen, he became a grocery clerk; perhaps here he developed the talent for trading, afterward so marked in his political rise. In the fashion made popular by Abraham Lincoln and other great men he secured an

education and on the day he attained his majority, was admitted to the practice of law in Benton County.

About the same time he entered the broader profession of politics, being then a lukewarm Whig. But in 1856 we find him an interested spectator at the birth of a new party; doubtless no one who saw the awkward, countrified youth so closely watchful of the proceedings could have believed that he and the new party would prove a combination that would later dominate the state, even create some stir in the nation. What he believed is not on record, save that on the return trip to New Chelsea he remarked solemnly to the Honorable Robert Dunmeade (Congressman), "Within four years the Republican party will carry this state, and within eight years it will elect a president." To which that gentleman, who had already received evidence of the young man's political astuteness, listened with some respect. The prophecy was fulfilled even earlier than the date fixed by the youthful politician, which caused a serious unpleasantness between North and South. William Murchell had by that time taken the preliminary steps toward effecting the alliance just mentioned.

His military services are perhaps best dismissed with the mention of a certain gold medal struck in his honor, by special act of Congress, for gallant conduct on the field of battle. The invidious have made much of this decoration. However, it probably required a finer courage to resign from the colonelcy of his Home Guard regiment on the eve of Gettysburg — this indeed was the fact — to accept the less exposed office of aide to the governor at the capital, than to face the hail of rebel bullets. There are many ways of ex-

pressing one's patriotism. Later he served his country as Prothonotary for Benton County. Afterward he passed through many gradations of political preferment, as representative in the general assembly of his state, as state senator, as state treasurer and finally as United States senator, which exalted office he held until — but we anticipate our history. He became in addition leader of the Republican organization, an euphemism employed by those who objected to the term "boss."

William Murchell's *credo* was that of a respectable but practical man. He was a teetotaler and a Presbyterian elder and believed in the doctrine of foreordination and in a literal scriptural hell for those not numbered among the elect. He was a Republican and believed devoutly in the avowed and tacit principles of that party (although he was not bigoted and would on occasion take a secret hand in the affairs of the opposition). As a sub-article of this tenet he held that only those were Republicans who were loyal to the regular organization; he had more than once read out of the party foolhardy young men who ventured to oppose his leadership. He believed, moreover, that the Almighty had predestined and equipped some men for leadership and that lesser folk ought frankly to yield obedience to this decree of an all-wise Providence. He was, as has been intimated, a practical man, and he followed unquestioningly certain time-worn but useful maxims, such as, "The end justifies the means." He clung especially to that theory of practical politics immortalized in Andrew Jackson's time. Yet he had read history and was not without a sense of humor.

He lived during at least two months of every year in the town of his birth, either in the square, white frame house on Maple Street or at the farm, three miles west, which he let "on shares." Change of dynasties has removed New Chelsea from the political map. But time was when the fashion was to speak humorously of it as the "capital *de facto*." This was during the period of the Murchell ascendancy, when gentlemen interested in the political affairs of the commonwealth were wont to make pilgrimages to the Maple Street house.

New Chelsea was a quaint, old-fashioned town lying at the head of the Weehannock Valley, quite content with its population of five thousand and with the honor of being the county seat, which Murchell's influence had prevented from being moved to Plumville. When citizens of that thriving little factory city — fifteen miles away — casually mentioned the latest census, New Chelseans would smile a superior smile; they knew that the importance of a community is determined by the character rather than the numbers of its population. To prove this, they cited the case of Murchell; out of Bethlehem, not from Jerusalem, the king had been chosen.

Down Main Street, one fine June afternoon, he was walking with that air of abstraction which sits so well on the great.

"He has big possibilities." Unconsciously the senator spoke aloud.

His companion seemed to understand the reference. "He's all right," he answered. State Senator Jim Sheehan was a big, fat gentleman with furtive, twinkling eyes, a modicum of coarse good looks and a

rolling, cock-sure gait bred of no misfortune. He was a son of power. Fifteen years before he had gone to Plumville to work in the mills, an uncouth, unlettered Irishman who could tell a good story, hold unlimited quantities of liquor and was not unwilling to work when money could not be had otherwise.

But not long for him had been the grime and roar and muscle-racking of the mills; money could be had more easily. Plumville was booming. There were streets to be graded and paved, public buildings to be constructed. Jim went into politics and, because he was a good "vote-getter" and had a certain rough talent for the game, acquired power. He opened a saloon and acquired more power. He became a contractor and secured many contracts. One day the city awoke to the fact that Jim Sheehan owned its government. The citizens cried out in protest — and, with the habit of American cities, little and big, submitted. He became, by virtue of his alliance with Murchell, state senator from Benton County and leader — we cling to the euphemism — of the county organization.

"He's all right," he repeated, and chuckled.

"Eh?" said Murchell. "Who's all right?"

"Why, Johnny Dunmeade, of course. Didn't tell you how I happen to be goin' to see *him,* 'stead of the other way 'round. It's a horse on me, all right." He threw back his head and the chuckle became a loud guffaw. "Sent word for him to come to my office last Tuesday at two o'clock sharp. Guess he knew what for. He came, all right. I thought it'd do him good to cool his heels a while — keep him from gettin' too chesty, see? So I let him stay in the

front office while I read the newspaper inside. Guess he waited about half an hour and then got up. 'Present my compliments to Senator Sheehan,' he says to the boy, 'and tell him to go to the devil and learn how to keep his appointments.' And left. 'Long about three o'clock I strolled out — and gets his message." Sheehan paused long enough to slap his thigh resoundingly. "He's all right. Ain't any one told me to go to the devil for some time."

"Good many think it, though." Murchell smiled. "You're not a very popular citizen, Jim."

"Huh!" Sheehan grunted. "I don't *need* to be popular, so long as the organization sticks. But say," he reverted to his topic, "it'll be a ten-strike, puttin' Dunmeade on the ticket. I'm glad we — I mean, you — thought of it. I've had my feelers out and he'll be worth five hundred extry majority — to the whole ticket."

"If he'll take the nomination."

"Take it? Of course, he'll take it. Ain't there fifteen hundred a year in it for him? And mebby, when his term's ended, he might go to the legislature as representative."

"Or state senator?"

Sheehan grinned. "Say, do I look like I was on my way to the boneyard?"

He became serious. "What's the matter with the people, anyhow? Raisin' hell all over the state — just because," he added complainingly, "one trust company went up and the cashier shot itself. Ain't business good? Ain't the organization given them good government?" he demanded.

"It has." Senator Murchell spoke with conviction.

"What do they want, then?"

"I don't know. They don't know. And as long as they don't know," Murchell said dryly, "you and I, Jim, needn't be afraid."

"I guess that's right.— Here we are."

They had reached and turned the corner of the street that bounds the court-house square on the north. They stopped at a frame, two-room shack, by the door of which hung a battered tin sign, "John Dunmeade, Attorney-at-Law." Sheehan led the way inside. Through the door of the inner room came the muffled drone of voices. The two men seated themselves in the anteroom and waited. Ten minutes passed.

Sheehan chuckled again. "I bet," he said, "he's seen us and is goin' to keep us waitin'. That's what I like about him — he's got nerve to make grandstand plays. A grandstand player makes a good candidate."

"Sheehan," Senator Murchell exclaimed impatiently, "for a smart man you talk a lot of foolishness."

Sheehan relapsed into a serene silence, staring ruminatively at a steel engraving of Daniel Webster. After a few minutes the door opened and John Dunmeade emerged, ushering out a big, bearded farmer. When the client had left, the young lawyer turned to his callers and shook hands, warmly with Murchell and hastily with Sheehan.

"Will you step inside, gentlemen?"

They took seats around the old, time-stained mahogany table. Sheehan drew forth from his waistcoat pocket a handful of fat, black cigars.

"Smoke?"

Murchell shook his head. John also declined.

"If you don't mind, I'll stick to my pipe." He filled and lighted it, then leaned back, surveying his callers expectantly.

"Well?" His look addressed the remark to Senator Murchell.

The senator smiled slightly. "I'm here only as an honorary vice-president. Ask Sheehan. He likes to talk."

"Sure," Sheehan grinned. "I ain't one of them that believes the feller that don't talk is deep and wise. He gener'ly ain't talkin' because he can't think of nothing to say." He paused, and continued, "Well, Mr. District Attorney—"

"Isn't that a little premature?" John interrupted.

For answer the Honorable Jim drew forth from another pocket a folded newspaper, which he spread out on his knees. Solemnly he began to read: "We should not dignify the present rather unsettled political conditions with the name crisis. But it is unquestionably a time when the Republican party must inspect its path carefully. At such a time it behooves it to choose as candidates only men whose fearlessness and honesty are not open to question. Benton County has this fall to fill the important office of district attorney. Of all those mentioned for this post we know of none who so well fills the bill as John Dunmeade, the popular and brilliant young lawyer of New Chelsea. His name," Sheehan's voice rose to a

triumphant climax; "his name has brought forth enthusiasm wherever mentioned. The entire county wants him. It will have him." He looked up. "What do you think of that, eh?"

"Which of you," John asked, "inspired that editorial?"

"I did," answered Sheehan. "I didn't write it, though," he confessed.

"Don't you think," John demanded, a little sharply, "you might have asked my consent before using my name as a candidate?"

"What the —" Then Sheehan recollected Senator Murchell's aversion to profanity. He stared in amazement. "Say, when I'm tryin' to do you a favor —"

"Not at all. You're doing yourself the favor of using me in a tight place. Do I understand you've come here to — to give me your consent to run?"

Murchell smiled. The sarcasm was lost on Sheehan.

"We came to say we'd support you."

"Then let me state the case to you as it is. The state is pretty much worked up over that trust company affair back east — I'm not sure it oughtn't to be worked up, either. The farmers in this county and a good many people in Plumville aren't very friendly to you personally at best. In short," he laughed, "you need some new timber to patch up the old ship of state. And you think I'll do."

Sheehan turned to Senator Murchell. "Senator, let's me and you go right out and resign and let Johnny here run things. Don't you want the job?" he demanded of John.

"I don't know yet. I'm thinking it over. But if I take it, it will be on condition —"

"On condition!"

"— that there are no conditions. I'd want to run my campaign and the office according to my own notions. I'd run it straight."

"Sure," agreed Sheehan.

"I really mean it, you know," John insisted. "I might even have to get after you, Sheehan."

This, to Sheehan, was humorous matter. "That's all right," he agreed again, grinning, "if you can catch me. You think it over, Johnny, and let me know to-morrow."

He rose. "Well, I guess I must be goin'. Are you comin' along, Senator?"

"Not just now, Sheehan," Senator Murchell answered.

"I'll be sayin' good day, then." Sheehan shook hands with Senator Murchell and John and moved toward the door. With his hand on the knob, he stopped.

"You don't open the door for me the way you did for your rube friend, Johnny!" He laughed.

"Pardon me." John took a step toward him. But Sheehan opened the door himself.

"Don't mind. I'm able-bodied yet." And went out.

John went to the window, where he watched the politician until the swaggering figure disappeared around the corner. Murchell, with a faint twinge at his heart, saw the distaste plainly written on the young man's face. The twinge was because the time had come to grind his young friend through the mills of

the organization. He could not understand the sharp little pain. Surely any man in his senses would be glad to be converted into fine, useful meal. And the senator, who set a low value upon gratuitous services, proposed to make the grinding process worth while to the man who was to be ground. He was already forming vague plans of setting him on the road to high political station; perhaps John might even prove to be an Elisha, some day to assume a fallen mantle. The senator would have rejoiced in such a consummation, and for a reason that would have astounded those who looked upon him only as a crafty old fox, that might have astonished even himself had he analyzed it with the close care he usually gave to his mental processes.

To the portrait with which this chapter opened we may add that William Murchell was a bachelor — a matter for which he is not to be censured too severely, since he once made an earnest effort to repair the condition. His had been a very simple romance. He had loved, had laid himself and his aspirations at the lady's feet and had been rejected. A short time afterward he stood with his best friend as the latter took the same lady in holy wedlock. It is probable that he had his period of suffering; but, as became a man of ambition, he quickly put an end to it and gave himself to the climb to power. In time his romance was almost forgotten.

Almost! For in later years he formed the habit of looking back and wondering why he had been made to suffer his futile love. Not that he was a sentimental man! He merely, where other great men took recreation by reading detective stories, found occa-

sional relaxation in reliving his romance. Sometimes, in a mellow hour, he would construct for himself a scene in which a gentle-faced woman with gray-green eyes sat across the hearth and around them an indefinite number of the second generation. In the scene was always a pleasantly-laughing young man who peered out on the world through eyes like his mother's. This often occurred after Senator Murchell had met or heard something of John Dunmeade, a young man in whom he thought he saw a masculine replica of the woman of his romance. The senator's memory must have been good, for she had been dead many years. He was seeing her that June afternoon.

John returned to his chair. Murchell looked around at the dingy office. Over the desk hung a calendar and another faded, old-fashioned print of Daniel Webster. Save for this adornment the walls were given over to calf- and sheep-bound books; rows and rows set upon plain pine shelves. The old mahogany furniture, doubtless splendid in its day, had been battered and scratched by many careless hands and feet.

"You keep the old office just the same, I see. I remember when your grandfather built and furnished it."

"Yes, I don't like to disturb things — though Aunt Roberta thinks it's a fearful mess. Three generations of Dunmeades have used this office just as it is."

"I used to come here to borrow books from your grandfather — and talk politics. He was a mighty

smart man. He would have been governor during the war, if he hadn't died. He gave me my start."

"Yes," John said idly.

"Senator," he leaned forward abruptly, "what do you think of Sheehan?"

"He is," Senator Murchell said cautiously, "a diamond in the rough."

"Decidedly in the rough!"

"He's smarter than he talks. He has power. Don't make an enemy of him, John — don't make him an enemy."

"He's a vicious type," John declared.

"Your grandfather used to say, 'There's no man so bad and no man so good that he can't be made useful.' Sheehan has been mighty useful to — his party." The pause was almost imperceptible.

"Senator, why don't you, with all your power, put men like Sheehan out of politics?"

"Young man," Murchell answered dryly, "if I were strong enough to put all the rascals out of politics, I'd make the Almighty jealous. And if I did put them out, I couldn't fill their places. I've heard there are a few saints on earth, but they're not in politics."

John smiled skeptically. "There's an answer to that — if I only knew it." He sighed.

"Are you going to take the nomination?"

"I hate to be under obligations to Sheehan."

"You won't be under obligations — to Sheehan."

"I don't want to be under obligations —" John hesitated a moment —"to you. Something might come up that would make me seem ungrateful."

"I'll risk it."

"But I'm not sure I'm the kind of man you want."

"I'll risk it," Murchell repeated.

"But I don't think you understand," John persisted. "I've been — bothered a little lately about some things. That trust company affair, for instance — it doesn't look right. And then Sheehan — I can't quite stomach his power. I'm afraid I haven't given politics the attention a man should give — and I can't quite decide these questions yet."

"You don't have to decide them. And don't believe all the rumors you hear."

"But I'm afraid that trust company rumor has been pretty well substantiated. I don't like to seem to criticize, Senator," he said courteously, "but it looks to me as though the system that allowed that affair must be wrong somewhere."

"Tut! tut! young man," the senator answered, a trifle testily, "don't go flying off at a tangent with harebrained theories about perfect systems. As long as men are weak and imperfect, any system they devise will make some mistakes, won't it? And since the Almighty made some men strong enough to do pretty much as they please, they're going to do things that way. I guess He knew what He was doing when He made such men." Again Senator Murchell spoke with conviction.

John shook his head in troubled fashion. "I've got to figure that out in my own way, Senator."

Murchell looked out of the window into the Square, thoughtfully. It was a warm, listless day. The leaves on the trees, stirred by the gentle breeze, whispered spiritlessly. The flag, the one brilliant splash

of color in the sober picture, flapped lazily at the head of its tall mast. A few small boys, who had been playing ball, were lying on the grass, even their young sportiveness not proof against the general inertia. There was nothing in the peaceful, indolent scene to tell him that the serene waters upon which he had sailed to power were to become a seething, passion-lashed fury whose subsidence he would never see. He knew only that the people, even — sad example of the ingratitude of republics! — the people of Benton County, were stirring restlessly, asking questions and criticizing answers. But that would pass, as such ebullitions had always passed! Neither the face beside him, troubled by a problem old as life itself, nor the returning twinge at his heart deterred him from carrying out his resolution to press the young man into his service. There is a scriptural injunction concerning putting one's hand to the plow, which Senator Murchell had read and always obeyed.

He pointed to the sleepy Square. "You won't want to sit here looking out at that all your life — if you're the man I take you for. You'll want to go out and make your place — a big place — in the life of men. If you do, you can't stop to hit every ugly head that pops up in your path. And you've got to make use of the materials you find. Leave the things that don't look right alone — they'll work themselves out in the end. They always have. And be impersonal. Make use of enemies and friends alike."

Counsel to Laertes from an expert in life!

"Even your friendship?" John interrupted quickly, smiling.

"You'd be a fool if you didn't," Polonius replied consistently.

"I'm afraid," John sighed; "I'm afraid I'm that kind of fool. I suppose," he went on, "I'm going to take the nomination. I *do* want to make a place for myself in the big life of men. But I want to *earn* it, not seize it because I am strong enough, or have it given to me by some other who is strong." He hesitated, then continued, "It sounds absurd, I know, but something seems calling, compelling me into this. And I'm — I'm afraid. I have the feeling that I am facing something to which I perhaps may not be equal. Senator Murchell, I ask you to tell me truly, is there any reason why a man who wants to come through clean should not go into politics?"

"Absolutely none," the senator answered promptly. And he added sincerely, with a pertinence the scope of which he did not comprehend, "If there were more clean men in politics, there would be less room for the rascals."

So William Murchell, as he thought, bound his young friend, John Dunmeade, to the wheels of his organization. *Ex post facto* criticism is easy; even Napoleon's strategy sometimes erred.

News travels swiftly and by mysterious avenues in New Chelsea. That evening at supper Judge Dunmeade congratulated his son.

"I am glad," he said ponderously, "that you have entered the service of your party."

Miss Roberta, the judge's sister, sniffed disdainfully. "Does that mean pulling chestnuts out of the coals

for pussy Murchell? You better keep out of politics, John. There'll be trouble, I feel it in my bones."

The judge frowned and John laughed. Her bones, if Miss Roberta was to be believed, often essayed the rôle of prophet.

John's laughter quickly subsided. "I have a profound regard for your judgment, Aunt Roberta."

"And a will of your own."

"I hope so."

"You'll need it."

"Roberta," chided the judge, "it doesn't lie in a Dunmeade's mouth to speak disparagingly of one who has placed our family under such obligations as has William Murchell."

"Meaning your judgeship, I suppose."

The judge stiffened visibly. "I trust my own character and ability had something to do with that."

"Are you depending on them to make you a justice?" It was an open secret in the Dunmeade family that the judge aspired to end his days on the supreme bench of the state.

He treated the jibe to the silence it deserved, and Miss Roberta, who did not ignore the value of the last word in a tilt, triumphantly rose from the table and left the room.

"Your aunt," remarked the judge, "lets her habit of saying biting things run away with her judgment."

"Ye-es?" said John doubtfully.

"Yes!" said the judge emphatically. "To follow in the footsteps of such a man as William Murchell entails no loss of self-respect."

"At least, there's ample precedent for it."

"And honorable precedent, I hope," the judge supplemented, having himself in mind.

John looked thoughtfully at his father, a question momentarily halting his elation over his prospective preferment. Hugh Dunmeade was held by his neighbors, and hitherto had been accounted by his son, a good man, a just judge and an exemplary citizen. His dicta, judicial and private, carried great weight in the community. And he seemed troubled by no questions of — not having formulated the disturbing doubt, John called it — propriety.

"In whose footsteps," John suddenly asked, "did Murchell follow?"

"Being a great man," answered his father, "he blazed his own path and led his party after him."

The implication called a twinkle into John's eyes, but he made no retort.

"I hope," Judge Dunmeade continued, "you aren't falling into your aunt's habit of looking a gift horse in the mouth."

"Then it — this nomination — will be a gift from Murchell?"

"You couldn't have it otherwise."

"And you see nothing wrong in that?"

"I, myself, should be glad to have his support for any office I might seek." The judge regarded this answer as sufficient. "I'm glad you have it. It shows his friendship for us continues. And," he cleared his throat significantly, "it augurs well for other honors to — ahem! — our family."

Two little creases settled between John's eyes.

Miss Roberta was a vigorous spinster of sixty whose caustic tongue tried, not always successfully, to hide the kindly impulses of her heart. It would be absurd, of course, to say that she had preserved the bloom of her youth; but she had preserved her hair, which was something. And she bore herself, if not with the buoyancy of earlier years, at least with an upright dignity highly becoming in the only daughter of New Chelsea's first family. Not that Miss Roberta was so wrapped up in the glories of the past that she forgot the exigencies of the present. Woe betide the huckstering farmer who ventured to proffer his wares at exorbitant prices! It was her belief, not without justification in the fact, that she had been indispensable to the judge and his son; hence she scolded and disciplined them freely. She was a lady of many violent dislikes, notably for Senator Murchell and Warren Blake, and a few equally violent friendships; although it was matter for doubt whom she made the more uncomfortable, enemies or friends, toward both of whom she allowed herself the privilege of frank criticism.

Later in the evening she found John alone on the western porch, staring up into the sky. The prophecy of the morning's red sunrise was about to be fulfilled; a storm was brewing. Athwart the sky hung heavy black clouds, turned momentarily by the lightning flashes into the murky yellow of damp wood smoke. Under the rising wind the trees swayed and bent as though shaken by the hand of some invisible giant.

"Isn't it great, though! I never tire of watching

a storm come up. There's a majesty about it, a sort of —"

"Humph! It's going to be wet and your father's rheumatics will be worse," interrupted Miss Roberta, eminently practical. "You better go up-stairs and close the windows."

John laughingly obeyed. When he returned, Miss Roberta was still on the porch, staring disapprovingly at the advancing storm.

"Don't you like it?"

"I do not. Ugh!" Miss Roberta jumped, as an exceptionally brilliant flash shot its jagged path across the clouds. "I told your father he ought to put up new lightning rods."

"Isn't there any poetry in you, Aunt Roberta?"

"Poetry indeed!" The accompanying sniff was eloquent. John returned to his contemplation of the storm.

"Steve Hampden," Miss Roberta remarked in a carefully casual tone, "is home. And Katherine," she added.

"Yes?" negligently.

"You go and call on her. Go to-night."

"Can't. I have —" he yawned "— an appointment with the sandman. I didn't sleep much last night."

"Humph! You never were in bed at all. Go to-morrow, then."

"Won't she keep? She seemed healthy enough the last time I saw her. Regular little red-headed tomboy she was."

"She mightn't stay long." Miss Roberta's tone implied that this contingency would be little short of

calamitous. "And Warren Blake is dancing after her already."

"Dear Aunt Roberta, Warren never in his life did anything so frivolous as dancing. Why are you in such a hurry to have me fall in love?"

"I don't want you to grow old and crabbed and — and lonesome — like me."

"Why — why, Aunt Roberta! I didn't know you felt that way. You mustn't, you know," he said gravely, and patted her hand affectionately, from which unwonted demonstration she hastily snatched it away.

He laughed. "There's time enough for mating, anyhow. I'm only thirty. And besides, what could I offer a girl, even if I were so reckless as to fall in love?"

"Yourself." Miss Roberta could not entirely repress a hint of pride.

"Those spectacles you're always losing must be rose-colored. I'd want to offer something more than myself, Aunt Roberta; something of achievement that would prove my worth. I couldn't love a woman who could care for a little, futile man. When I've *done* something, then —"

"I know what you're thinking, Johnny; don't go into politics."

"I've got to. I don't want to go all my life as I have gone, drudging along for a little money, drying up in the routine, my outlook narrowing. I'd have nothing to show in justification of my living. Why, I'd be no better than Warren Blake, Aunt Roberta."

One might by a stretch of the imagination have called the sound Miss Roberta emitted, a laugh.

He pointed to the lowering sky. A vivid flash for an instant tossed back the gathering darkness. She saw his face grow suddenly eager, intense.

"I want to get into the storm of the vital things, to see how big I am, to find out what I'm worth. Surely I can do something better than examining titles and drawing deeds and trying line-fence cases all my life. I'm thirty already — do you realize it? — and I've done nothing but drift. It isn't life. That's what I want — the big life of vital action."

"Life! You young folks are always talking about life. What do you know about it? You go into the storm and what do you get? You get — you get rheumatism of the soul — that's what you get. And when fair weather comes again, you're too stiff and achey to know it. I know! And I know, too," she added grimly, "there's no use talking. Don't sit up all night."

He laughed again. She went into the house, leaving him to stare up into the racing storm. The chill, damp wind stung his face and he joyed in it, and in the splendid play of the lightning. So, he told himself, he would joy in the play of those forces which move men to good and ill. He was young; fear could not abide with him long. He watched until the clouds opened and the slanting deluge fell.

CHAPTER III

SUNSET

ACROSS Main Street from the court-house square — scene of Daniel Webster's famous speech, the war-time demonstrations and the annual Republican rally — stands a red-brick, white-porticoed mansion in the style we distinguish as colonial. In the generous yard are several fine old chestnut trees, saplings when the pioneer first set eyes on the Weehannock Valley. From the street the passer-by can catch a glimpse of an old-fashioned garden in the rear. This house was built in the early thirties by Thomas Dunmeade, founder of New Chelsea, then in his eightieth year, a period of life when his thoughts should have been centered on heavenly glories but were in fact busied with the cares and vanities of this world. The mahogany furnishings came west by way of the canal, because the builder, a somewhat obstinate old gentleman who had not forgotten the indignity of his departure from the Steel City — on a rail, behind a revenue officer during a certain insurrection — refused to patronize the industries of that infant metropolis.

Thomas lived just long enough to install himself in the new house; then he died in an apoplectic fit following a choleric denunciation of Andrew Jackson. The title to the house descended to the pioneer's son Robert, a gentleman of parts who, as founder of the flour

mills, brought commercial consequence, and as congressman for one term, the honors of statesmanship, to the town of his nativity. In Robert's day the house with the stately portico became a center of influence even more effective if less aggressive than that of the domineering Thomas. A guest-book kept during this period records the names of many notables who tasted Robert's hospitality. Daniel Webster himself on the memorable occasion of his New Chelsea speech lay overnight in the big spare room overlooking the garden. In Robert's later years his home became a hotbed for the Abolition propaganda, the future of which he foresaw. This work, with his considerable properties, was in the gloomy days preceding the war handed down to his son Hugh, the soldier and, later, the judge of the house of Dunmeade.

Miss Roberta and John were sitting under a tree in the front yard. It was Sabbath afternoon in New Chelsea. No other phrase can quite do justice to the heavy stillness, broken only by an occasional rooster's crow raised in plaintive defiance of Presbyterian traditions and by the far-off sacrilegious tinkle of a mandolin, played doubtless by some hardy sinner, a summer resident. In the middle of the air the instrument suddenly became voiceless, as though overcome by the unresponsiveness of the day. John laughed.

"I was betting he wouldn't play it through."

"I wonder," mused Miss Roberta, "how Steve Hampden liked the sermon?"

"He probably wasn't listening."

"Warren Blake walked home from church with Katherine," she remarked significantly.

"She was there, then?"

"Didn't you see her?"

"I heard the stir when she came in. But, strange to relate, I was more interested in the service, and I forgot to look her up after church."

"Why won't you go to see her?"

John rose with a sigh of resignation. "Aunt Roberta, you are a woman of one idea. I see I shall have no peace of mind until I've paid my respects to this gilded lady. I go!"

"Huh! In my time young men were more mannerly to attractive young ladies. Are you going to take cards?" she inquired anxiously.

"And prove that New Chelsea knows what's what in the world of fashion? My dear aunt, I leave that to Warren Blake. Besides," he laughed, "I haven't any."

He sauntered up Main Street into the newer part of the town where the well-to-do summer resident had encamped. At its extreme northerly edge he came to the end of his journey.

He could never repress a smile when he saw it. Almost within the span of his memory the evolution of the Hampden place — it was always called a "place"— keeping pace with its owner's fortune, had been wrought. The first house on that site had been a five-room, frame cottage, built just before the war when Stephen Hampden was manager of the Dunmeade mills. Hampden himself had painted that first home; a fact of which in later years he, but not his wife, was prone to boast. His own hands, too, had set out the maples, which alone survived change of fortune. But before the cottage needed repainting, the mills had burned down never to be rebuilt, and he had

moved to Plumville. It is said that he laid the foundation of his fortune in a certain contract for army horse shoes. And Hampden was of those Yankee necromancers who have discovered what baffled the alchemists of the dark ages, a philosopher's stone to transmute oil, coal, iron — even Plumville real estate! — into gold. In the seventies, being then owner of that city's largest iron foundry, he inaugurated the custom of returning to New Chelsea for the hot months. The little cottage was torn down. In its place was reared a red-brick house, liberally adorned with turrets and scroll-work in the style of that period; cast-iron deer were set up in the yard. It is remembered in New Chelsea that Steve Hampden was exceedingly proud of this new home.

The foundry grew; even outgrew its owner, whose taste, if not his talents, ran to speculation rather than to production. He sold out and went to the Steel City to pursue fortune via the bourse and the real estate market. In these days New Chelsea saw him and his family only semi-occasionally; the house with the turrets and the iron deer had attained the dignity of a "country place." Then New Chelsea heard that Steve Hampden had been admitted into the enviable and exclusive circle of millionaires. With wealth and travel came taste. The "country house" was remodeled; although just why, New Chelsea did not know, since its simple charms seemed to have paled before the glittering splendor of Newport and Lenox. (New Chelsea, whose knowledge of "society" was somewhat vague, took a mighty pride in the Hampdens' social adventures, as amplified by rumor and the *Globe*.) The turrets were razed; wings were added to the

house; dwarf magnolias took the place of the cast-iron deer; rhododendrons were banked around the house. The iron picket-fence was removed and a hedge planted in its stead. Not all the architect's devices could make of the house a thing of beauty, so ivy was planted and trained to enshroud its naked ugliness. A few years with nature, assisted by the English gardener, and the transformation was complete.

But not enough! For New Chelsea knew of another structure in course of erection on the crest of East Ridge; to be the "palatial residence," as the *Globe* took pleasure in reporting, "of our fellow citizen, Stephen Hampden, who it is hoped will be often in our midst."

A butler answered John's ring and on inquiry informed him that the ladies were not at home.

"Will you wait, sir?"

"No." And John turned away to ponder this phenomenon.

"A butler — in New Chelsea! And I had no cards!"

He walked out into the country across the bridge at the confluence of North Branch and South Branch, where rises Grant's Knob. He followed the path that leads, corkscrew fashion, to the crest of the knob, and there, in the thick shade of a big walnut, leaning against an old boulder that had crowned the knob longer than John could remember, sat the object of his quest.

He had an instant to look at her before she observed him, and smilingly he availed himself of it. And very charming, very alluring she was to his eyes, in her light, summery gown and the big, soft leghorn

hat with its flowers and leaves dancing in the breeze. An open book lay in her lap, but she was not reading. Through half-closed eyes she was gazing dreamily at the hills that marched away into the blue distance. He had time to note that her face was unsmiling. Her gravity invested her with a soft girlishness that the confident, metallic young woman of the sunrise had lacked. He did not guess how long the picture then printed on his memory would remain with him.

He took a step toward her; she heard him and looked up.

"Hello!" he said.

"Good afternoon." Her salutation was very cool indeed.

He cast about for something witty to say. All he could think of was, "I didn't expect to find you here."

"Didn't you?"

He smiled. "Did you get home in time for breakfast the other morning?"

"Yes."

"I was well scolded for being so late. Aunt Roberta rules me with a rod of iron."

"You probably need it."

"I do. Has Crusader recovered?"

"Yes."

"Of course, if you don't want me to stay —"

"It isn't my hill."

He laughed outright. "Her tactics never vary, it seems," he remarked. "Effective, though. Queer, isn't it, how attractive a girl becomes when she puts on that frigid, speak-to-me-if-you-dare manner!"

"That could have been conveyed more wittily, I think."

"For instance? I am not unwilling to learn."

"I should have said, 'Even the undesired becomes interesting when it is unattainable.' Or —"

"O, that is quite sufficient! I bow to your superior wit. Only, as always with epigrams, it isn't strictly true." He stood with hands in pockets and feet spread apart, surveying her curiously. "So you're Katherine Hampden!"

"You were very stupid not to know it the other day."

"But I remembered you —"

"You mean, you forgot all about me."

"— as an impudent, long-legged, freckled tomboy with red hair, while you —" He paused deliberately.

"My hair was never red," she replied coldly.

"Yes, it was — when the sun was on it," he contradicted firmly. "The sun is on it now!" His eyes were bolder than his tongue. She promptly turned her head so that the big hat shaded the tresses in controversy.

Suddenly the clouds broke away. She returned to him with a laugh. "O, I can't keep it up. But where did you get your courage? You weren't nearly so brave the other morning."

"I didn't know who you were then. Mystery always frightens me — a little."

"But you really don't know me now."

"That can be quickly remedied," he answered briskly.

"You are a long time beginning. I've been here six

days. Why haven't you come to see me?" she demanded.

"Well, you see," he began lamely to explain, "I've had a good many important things to think about and —"

"And I was neither important nor interesting. You need practice, I see."

"But you are."

"You really find me interesting? You know, I've worked hard, very hard, to earn the involuntary, generous compliment I am about to receive."

"I do — surprisingly so," he responded promptly.

"You needn't be so surprised," she retorted. "I was always rather presentable, in spite of the freckles, only you wouldn't condescend to notice it. You didn't like me."

"But you were such a pesky little nuisance, you know," he explained. "You had no reverence for old age. You persisted in upsetting my dignity at every chance. And I thought a lot of my dignity in those days. Let me see," he added reflectively, "that was — yes, it's been ten years since I last saw you. Not counting the other morning, of course."

"No, eight," she corrected him. "You saw me after the big game, the time you saved the day. You walked right by me, looking straight into my eyes — and never recognized me. You were too anxious to reach Adele Whittington and be made a hero of by her."

He laughed self-consciously. "Oh, Adele! And is that play still remembered? But I wasn't a hero, you know. It was a lucky fluke. I really wasn't a

good player, but things broke luckily for me those days."

"Yes," she nodded, "you would be apt to say that. But Adele didn't think so. She was as proud as — as I'd have been, if I'd had the chance — to exhibit you."

"How is Adele?"

"O, she's dreading thirty, is fighting down a tendency to fat, has begun to paint and often asks about you. Are you still in love with her? And am I a cat to talk so about her? And has she had many successors?"

"No, to all three questions. She gave me a bad three months, though."

"I'm glad of it," she declared vengefully. "Because — am I not brazen? — you gave me a bad — longer time than that. Everybody teased me about it. Didn't you know I was terribly in love with you? That's what made me such a pesky little nuisance.— O, you needn't look so shocked, since it was only calf love and I have quite recovered. Quite!"

He burst into a roar of laughter. "I beg your pardon," he gasped, when he had partially recovered his gravity. "I'm not laughing at you,— at myself. For a second I almost believed that — ha! ha! — you meant it." He held out his hand. "Are you aware that we haven't shaken hands? I am delighted to meet you again."

She put her hands behind her back and observed him suspiciously. "I'm not quite sure that you weren't laughing at me. You're assured that I'm not flirting with you?"

"Why should you flirt with me — when Warren Blake is in town?"

Suspicion broke up in smiles. "Do you want to make me giggle? Why shouldn't I, since there's no one else in town but Warren? But you're quite sure I'm not, aren't you?"

"Quite sure."

"You're fibbing now, and not at all convincingly. But —"

She placed her hand in his.

So, while the golden afternoon waned, they exchanged pleasant nonsense. His spirits rose unaccountably. He was very boyish, very gay. Sometimes they rose to half-serious discussion that skipped lightly and audaciously about from peak to peak of human knowledge. He discovered that she had read Nietzsche, at least enough for conversational purposes, that they differed widely on Ibsen and agreed on Meredith and that she gloried in Wagner. "It is the tremendous quality of his work over which people rave, and for once they are right. Elemental strength, the grandeur of primitive passion, for good or ill, just about describes it. You agree?" Out of his scant acquaintance with the composer in question he agreed, smiling at her enthusiasm. She had traveled much with her father, who, it appeared, had "really learned how to travel," having to make the most of his limited leisure. She knew places not starred in Baedeker, quaint, obscure corners of the earth, full of color. John helped out this part of the talk with questions more or less intelligent. She was pleased to commend his interest.

"One could almost believe you had been there.

You would enjoy these places, I know. Not every one does. I'd love to visit, not do, them with you sometime."

"I'd like to, very much. But," he answered simply, "I'm afraid it will be a long, long time before I can afford it."

She turned and surveyed him thoughtfully. "Now I like that — the way you said it, I mean. Most of the men I've met lately have lots of money. The ones who haven't are always making a poor mouth about being hard up, as though they were half ashamed of it and entirely detested it. But you spoke of it in such a matter-of-fact way, as though the lack or possession of money were really of no great importance to you."

"It slipped out," he confessed. "I don't like to seem to pose. I make enough for my immediate needs, of course, and some day I expect to have more — though not wealth as you probably measure it. But I honestly think money, in large quantities that is, isn't really important. At least, I haven't found it so yet."

"I've wondered about that sometimes — whether it is really important to me, I mean. I'm not sure. I do like the things it buys. But even more I like to think of the power it represents. It's that, and the game of getting it, that makes men want money in large quantities. Don't you think so?"

"I have heard so," he answered cautiously.

"But you don't agree?"

He remembered certain rumors he had heard concerning Stephen Hampden's rise to wealth and he put a guard upon his lips.

"I don't know much about it, I fear," which was entirely true.

"You may bring yourself to date," she said.

"There isn't much to tell. After college I went to law school, then settled here. The family name, and father's being judge, helped me to a quick start, I suppose. Since then I have done about as well as the average young lawyer in a small town. That is all. It is very commonplace."

"*Hamlet* minus Hamlet, of course. It doesn't explain why you are wanted by a whole county."

"You have that from the *Globe*," he smiled.

"But I have heard it from other sources since. Why do they want you?" she persisted.

"I don't know," he answered veraciously. "I don't even know that they want me. It is to be proven."

"I'd find that out quickly," she said thoughtfully. "And why. It's your chance to escape the commonplace, isn't it? Popularity means power, and power is splendid always — I'm primitive, you see. I would use it, revel in it, make it lift me into the high places. Dad says every one believes you have a big future. Which is good evidence that you have a big future, isn't it?"

"The wisdom of twenty-three!" he laughed.

"O, if you won't take me seriously —! Just as I was preparing to plan your future so nicely, too. If we are to be good friends — we are, aren't we? — you mustn't try to hold me off when I seem to take a too intimate interest in your affairs. I have an unfortunate propensity for that sort of thing — and I like it. Dad says I have the most intrusively executive

mind he ever met. He is very nice about it. He often asks me what I think of things and men —"

"And then forms his own opinions?"

"That," she sighed, "is the disappointing fact."

"Did you plan that?" He pointed to a grove of trees on the crest of East Ridge, through which gleamed the white stucco walls of that palatial residence so frequently mentioned in the *Globe*.

"Yes. Do you like it?"

"I haven't seen it except at a distance. Er — are you building an institution for the blind?"

She laughed gaily.

"Not unless dad's belief in his perspicacity, which I share, is without justification. But please don't poke fun at it. I'm rather proud of it. I'll take you there some day and you shall see for yourself."

"But why," still pointing, "in New Chelsea?"

"Why not?" she argued with spirit. "Aren't our hills as beautiful as the Berkshires, and the air as fine? Why shouldn't we enjoy the place the money comes from? Dad says a lot of money is to come from this valley in the next few years."

His face became suddenly grave. Thinking of her last words, he looked down at the quaint, old-fashioned, drowsing town that lay at the foot of the knob. Then his gaze wandered out to the green slopes of the valley, turning yellow in squares under the warm kiss of the sun. It swept for miles before him, seeming shut off from the world by the rampart of the hills; yet, he knew, one could sit in a canoe and float from the valley to the southern gulf. By the same trail over which sons of New Chelsea had gone out, the world, even then threatening — far away across

the hills hovered a perennial cloud, smoke of Plumville's mills — might invade, with its tumult and haste, its fever for conquest. Already it was being whispered that the sudden return of the captain of finance, the building of the big house with its air of permanence, were not without commercial significance. John was a young man given to sentiment. His first impulse was to protest against what seemed an imminent desecration of the lazy, restful beauty of the valley.

"I was thinking of New Chelsea," he said dryly. "So the old order changeth. The world of fashion and finance comes aknocking at our door. Our peaceful valley is to be exploited."

"Is there any virtue in closing one's door to progress?"

"Are we not progressive? Main Street is being paved. We are to have a new station in the fall. And there is talk of building a new court-house."

"You're a very frivolous person, I see! That is the cry of inertia. Why shouldn't a community make the most of itself, just as a man wants to make a big place for himself?"

And he was silenced, recalling words of his own.

She rose and stood gazing out over the valley. "Look!" The line of shadow, flung by the knob athwart the slope of its neighbor, had passed the last terrace of East Ridge. Like a runner finishing his race, it seemed to gather added speed as it neared the summit.

"Can't you see the world moving — and New Chelsea with it?"

He was not looking at the shadow but at her, silhouetted against the sky, strong with the strength of women whose fathers have toiled close to the soil, eager, palpitating with life, for life. He could see the profile of her face, a hint too firm for mere beauty; the masses of brown hair with its tint of flame, the fearless, level-gazing gray eyes, the eager, confident poise of her head. He wondered curiously what manner of woman she was — or might become — with her girlish inconsequence, her veneer of memorized information, her superficial, haphazard reading, her unconsciously amusing air as she lightly disposed of problems that had baffled the ages, beneath all of which he sensed an abounding vitality; and what lay under the precocious hardness that could see only the picturesque in a ramshackle, poverty-stricken Italian village and could dismiss with a careless laugh the fate of a chick in a hawk's clutches.

The line of shadow passed the summit of East Ridge; the valley lay in twilight. They watched until the sun sank. The blue haze of the distant hills became purple, black. Already a thin ribbon of rising mist marked the course of the river. Into the western sky were flung the emblazoned banners of the dying day.

"Shall we go down?"

Together they went slowly down into the valley and its twilight.

"We have now seen," she said, "a sunrise and a sunset together."

"'And the evening and the morning were the first day,'" he quoted smilingly.

"I wonder what the next day holds."

"Aunt Roberta," he laughed, "hopes that I'll fall in love with you."

"How perfectly absurd! Although it might redress the balance. Unless," she added demurely, "I should suffer a return of my youthful malady."

"Which would be doubly absurd. It's like chicken-pox. Having had one attack, you are thereafter immune."

They laughed gaily.

On the terrace little tables were set and John renewed his acquaintance with Stephen Hampden, a short, stocky, pleasant-voiced man, who in no way resembled the marauding pirate that rumor had him; also with Mrs. Hampden, a lady who toiled not nor spun, but was always tired and talked in a languid, honeyed voice. There were also Warren Blake, solemn and handsome; and his mother, a shy, faded old woman, frightened in the presence of "society folk," and not altogether happy in the Sunday splendor of best black silk and bonnet. After the interruption, Mrs. Hampden continued her drawling explanation to Warren, a patient listener, that one needn't be in Newport before August and that really, since England had discovered American society, that gilded resort and its sisters, Lenox and Tuxedo, were become as English as Bath. She went on, however, to inform him that Newport would be deprived of the Hampdens' presence that summer, because she had the new house to open and, moreover, preferred to remain with her husband, who had important business matters to oversee.

"She means," Katherine whispered, "that dad caught a tartar in Wall Street."

Thereafter Warren was left to the tender mercies of his hostess, Hampden strove to put Mrs. Blake at her ease, and John and Katherine flirted outrageously at their table, whither Warren cast occasional furtive glances. Later the Blakes rose to leave; Warren with surprising tact covering the awkwardness of his mother's farewells, and then, unostentatiously gentle, escorting her away.

Hampden caught his wife yawning daintily. "Well, Maria, since you're so tired, we might as well go in and leave these young people to themselves. The chaperon has no standing in New Chelsea. We've got to remember how the old folks used to let us alone when we were sparking." He grinned wickedly at Katherine whose composure was not ruffled in the slightest.

"Stephen, don't be vulgar," his wife rebuked him sighingly. After a languid good night to John she went, with an air of utter weariness, into the house.

Hampden, however, for the space of one cigar, remained on the terrace, chatting pleasantly, during which time John discovered that even Steve Hampden, hard driver of men and daring speculator, had a very likable side and took a mighty pride in his daughter. When the cigar had been tossed away, Hampden rose, shaking hands cordially with John.

"I'd better take my own advice. I have to work to-morrow, but don't you miss this fairy night. Come around often, John. And don't let this girl flirt the head from your shoulders."

"I'm already fearful for my peace of mind," John laughed. "But I shall come often, thank you."

Afterward, while the moon crawled almost to mid-sky, he and Katherine sat in a pleasant intimacy that, speeded by the moonlight, traveled far, listening to the hymn of the night intoned by the crickets and whispering leaves. He went home at last, in high good humor with the world and the people in it.

CHAPTER IV

THE NAZARITE

IT would be evidence of an officious surveillance to set down here just how often John Dunmeade journeyed to the ugly house behind the hedge; it was not, however, thanks to the duties of his candidacy, as often as he would have liked. There were occasional tennis matches in which he was hard pushed to defeat her. Golden flecks appeared on Katherine's cheeks and nose, and she discovered that her endurance was greater than his.

"You smoke too much," she told him one day with that air of finality which she employed to voice obvious truths. "One should always be in training. Health is so important to a man who wants to do big things."

He cut down his smoking to four pipes a day.

But there were other matters demanding the attention of John Dunmeade, Republican nominee for the office of district attorney by grace of the bosses' choice. For he saw an army, whose discipline and weapons and effectiveness caused him to wonder, go forth to war. Not with pomp and panoply — that was to come later; this was the time for scout and reconnaissance, for the drawing of maps, the seizing of strategic positions and for numbering the enemy. The enemy — the people — John perceived, made no

counter preparations, did not even see the necessity. Like many another man he began to feel the significance of an institution to which he had grown used only when he had an immediate personal interest in it. And the campaign was one of conquest, and the army was paid as Napoleon paid the soldiers of his army of Italy.

Jeremy Applegate one day gave John a new point of view. Jeremy was an old soldier, a cripple, and a clerk in the recorder's office. Of such as Jeremy, Senator Murchell once said cynically, "Fill the jobs with cripples. A cripple will get as many votes as five big, husky fellows who ought to be doing a man's work."

"I'm almighty glad," said Jeremy, "that for once I've got to work for a man I got some respect for."

"You don't have to work for me, Jeremy, though I hope you will."

"Don't have to —! Where'd my job be, if I didn't work for the ticket?"

Then the smoldering resentment found voice. Jeremy grumbled, as soldiers sometimes will.

"I'm a pretty specimen of citizen, ain't I?" he exclaimed bitterly. "I got a job. It ain't a Republican, it's a county job. Democrats help to pay my salary. Why've I got it — because I'm fit for it? Guess you lawyers that have to read my kinky handwrite know better'n that. It's because I'm an old soldier and a peg-leg and the kind of shrimp that'll go round whinin' to his friends about his job so's to get them to vote the ticket. Yessir, I'm that kind. I fit for my country all right, but I did it because it was my duty, not so's to be able to get a job and beg for votes afterwards. I was a man then. Now I'm a parasite. For nigh onto

twenty years I've done it, because I can't make a livin' any other way, for good men and bad men, for them I can respect — mostly for them I can't respect. I ain't allowed a mind of my own ner a conscience and every time I go campaignin' I feel like a pup. Do you know what it is? It's hell, that's what it is."

"What we need," said John, "is civil service."

"Civil service! They've got civil service in the post-office. Did you ever hear of a postmaster or his clerk that wasn't in politics? They've got to be in and stay in, or they couldn't get or keep their jobs. There ain't any way out of it," he sighed. "If I quit, they'd find another shrimp. And if somebody licked us and took this office from us, they'd fire me and put in some feller that'd do the same as me. There ain't any chance for a man to serve his country these days. It's rotten, that's what it is — rotten!"

He turned away, mumbling to himself.

But a grumbling soldier often is a good fighter; witness Jeremy on a scouting expedition. It begins at the establishment of Silas Hicks, liveryman. Jeremy, being a peg-leg, can not tramp the weary miles ahead of him.

Silas grins knowingly as he receives his patron. "Campaign started, eh?"

"Uh-huh!" Jeremy sighs.

"I'll give you old Kim." Silas leads out a raw-boned, ancient, white steed. "Kim, he oughta draw a salary from the organization. That there horse'll smell out a Republican an' shy at a Democrat every time, he's been out campaignin' that often. Yessir! Looks to me," he adds inquiringly, "as if Johnny Dunmeade'll have a walk-over."

"It's the state ticket that'll make the trouble." Jeremy sighs again.

He drives out into the country, brow-wrinkled as he marshals his arguments. He has no eyes for the calm beauty of the afternoon. He pulls in the jogging horse beside a field in the middle of which a man is seen driving a hay-rake. In response to Jeremy's hail the man descends from his seat and walks slowly over to the fence.

"Howdy, comrade," says Jeremy.

"Howdy, Jeremy."

"Good harvestin' weather."

"Purty good," comrade agrees. There is not a cloud in the sky.

"Smoke?" suggests Jeremy. From a bulging pocket he draws forth a cigar girdled by a gaudy red-and-gold band. They are very good cigars, costing ten dollars the hundred. At home repose three boxes of them, recently purchased. Jeremy has needed a new suit and his wife a new dress for more than a year. These luxuries, however, must be postponed for the purchase of ammunition. For this is war; and Jeremy, as we have seen, subscribes to General Sherman's definition.

The farmer holds the cigar to his nose, sniffing approvingly. "I'll keep it till after supper." He deposits it carefully on the bottom rail of the fence beside his water-jug.

Jeremy resorts again to the bulging pocket. "Keep that and smoke this now," he offers generously. The farmer lights the cigar. From another pocket Jeremy draws forth his own weed. This pocket is not so well

filled and contains only "three-fers" for Jeremy's own consumption.

After further preliminaries Jeremy opens fire.

"S'pose you're goin' to git into line this fall, same as ever, comrade?" he remarks casually.

The farmer leans on the fence in an attitude suited to comfortable argument. "Well, I don't know's I am."

"With Johnny Dunmeade on the ticket!"

"I'll vote for him. He's all right. Does my law work. I don't think much of the state ticket, though."

"You ain't goin' back on the party, are you?" Jeremy cries reproachfully.

"I might. Don't know yet."

Forthwith Jeremy launches into a passionate defense of the Republican party, in which the tariff and the single gold standard are freely mentioned. Reference is made also to the days when comrade and he shared blankets together on the red soil of Virginia. He talks rapidly, dreading to hear the argument which he can not answer. Comrade is not unimpressed but is far from conviction.

"Well, I don't know," he says slowly. And then brings forth the thing that has been haunting Jeremy's nights and days. "I'm bothered some about that trust company business. Looks to me as if some of Murchell's politicians was at the bottom of it. When they git to foolin' with our banks, it's time to make a change. If we let 'em go on, how'm I to know that my bank ain't mixed up with 'em?"

There is a silence, while Jeremy braces himself for his duty. "I know. It — it's been botherin' me, too.

But," he looks away and tries manfully to keep the whine out of his voice, " I'm askin' you as a favor to me to overlook it. They've served notice on me that I've got to bring in my list for the whole ticket or my job goes. You — you're on my list, comrade." Into Jeremy's eyes comes the look of a whipped dog.

There is another silence, a longer one, while the farmer chews his cigar reflectively.

" Well," he says at last, " I'd like to do ye a favor, Jeremy. I'll think it over."

" Yes," answers Jeremy, " think it over. It means a good deal to me.— Well, I guess I'll be moseyin' along."

But while Jeremy, protesting, accepts his tragi-comic serfdom, another — more important to this chronicle — is patiently weaving his destiny.

Many years before there had come to New Chelsea a shepherd to lead the Presbyterian flock and to die, leaving his wife, a shy, plain little woman, and her son, to struggle with the problem of existence. She must have struggled effectively, for New Chelsea bears witness that never was recourse had to its ready charity. Some credit must be given to the son who, when public school-days were over, bent himself to the problem: a moon-faced lad who blinked uncomprehendingly at the teasing and pranks of his former schoolmates. Slow, patient, unobtrusive, of the sort that despite sundry time-honored maxims usually finds recognition reluctant, he yet won it quickly.

When those of his generation whose fathers had been able to provide a college education returned on the threshold of manhood to begin life, they found Warren Blake already, in the eyes of his neighbors, a

success, assistant cashier of the bank and owner of certain small mortgages; but not at all boastful over it. He continued, even when he became cashier, modestly unaware that he had become a model young man; willing to say, "I don't know," when the fact warranted the admission and equally willing to fill the gaps of his knowledge. It was said that he had no imagination and was without a philosophy of life; which, since he was a success, was probably untrue. He was a literal man who took all things seriously, his duty to his bank, his treasurership of the Presbyterian Church, even the matter of clothes, of which — through close observation in hotel lobbies and painstaking study of certain magazines devoted to the sartorial art — he had acquired a discriminating knowledge; this last, as his only outward evidence of vanity, New Chelsea after a period of suspicious hesitation forgave. He was rarely known to laugh.

After thirty-five years' acquaintance New Chelsea had found no explanation of him; it was admitted that even Judge Dunmeade, who had a liking for sonorous phrases, had failed with his "triumph of the commonplace virtues." And it continued to choose Warren Blake as treasurer for those organizations requiring such an officer, executor of its last wills and testaments and trustee of its estates; of which trusts he always rendered prompt and exact accounts.

And now, all New Chelsea knew, he and Stephen Hampden were organizing a company of fabulous capitalization to work the coal-fields.

One morning in mid-July Warren was as usual at his desk. The day had already become hot and stifling. The clerks at the counter grumbled pro-

fanely at the rule, promulgated by Warren, that forbade them to appear coatless, and glanced enviously through the plate-glass partition at the cashier, very handsome and cool-looking in his light gray suit, socks and necktie to match. He was reading, with a slow care that overlooked no syllable, the papers on the desk. When he had read them he arranged them in two neat little piles which he labeled "Options Granted" and "Options Refused."

As this task was completed Stephen Hampden entered the bank with a pleasant nod in reply to the clerks' respectful greeting. He made his way into the cashier's office.

"Phew!" he whistled, drawing a chair up to the desk. "It's a hot day, isn't it? How do you manage to keep so cool?"

"By not thinking about the heat." Warren opened a drawer and drew forth a box of cigars, which he opened and proffered to his visitor.

"Thought you didn't allow smoking during hours," said Hampden, selecting a cigar.

"The clerks aren't president of the bank." Hampden looked in vain for an accompanying smile.

"Well, I'll exercise the presidential prerogative." He lighted the cigar. "Have you the options?"

Warren pushed the two piles of documents toward him. At one Hampden merely glanced; the other, "Options Refused," he opened and read rapidly.

"H-m-m! All Deer Township properties. Why won't they sign?"

"They want cash, not stock, for their coal."

"Did you point out to them the prospective value of the stock? And the necessity of being all in one

company to prevent price-cutting? And the opportunity to improve the community by opening up a new business?"

"I did. But we're not trying to improve the community, we're trying to make money for ourselves."

"I'm afraid, Warren, you were the wrong man to send after those options."

"I was," said Warren calmly. "I told you so at first. I'm not a clever talker."

"I don't want to tie up any more cash in this than I have to. How would it work to send John Dunmeade after those options? We could make him attorney for us and the company and give him stock. What do you think?"

Warren took several minutes to consider this suggestion. "He can do it if any one can," he said at last. "He is very popular among the farmers. Everybody likes him. I like him, too, though he is always laughing at me."

"Eh? Why does he laugh at you?" Hampden inquired.

"I don't know," answered Warren evenly. "I shall ask him sometime. Shall I send for him?"

"Yes."

Warren opened the door and sent one of his clerks with the message. Then he sat down, staring thoughtfully at the smoke from Hampden's cigar. Hampden took up a pad and pencil and began to make some calculations.

"He won't do it," Warren said suddenly.

"Why not?" Hampden looked up from his penciling.

"He's honest."

"Aren't we honest?" Hampden demanded sharply.

"We're not — sentimental," Warren answered calmly. "He is. We're trying to take advantage — legitimately, of course — of the farmers in a bargain. That's the thing he likes to fight."

"Not at all," Hampden contradicted coldly. "This is a straight business proposition. And I guess he'll not be sentimental when we offer him, say, ten thousand — in stock. We can let him have that much without losing control. I've never noticed anything of the fool in John Dunmeade. Even though," he added, "he sometimes laughs at you, Warren."

Warren ignored this thrust. "I don't think he'll take it," he insisted, without warmth. "And he isn't a fool. He doesn't need money. He's the sort that people take to, whether he has it or not. I'm not like that. I've got to have money to get people's respect. You're that kind, too."

"Eh?" Hampden stared, half-amused, half-angered by Warren's matter-of-fact explanation. Warren was not in the habit of talking of himself. "Turned philosopher, have you?"

"No, I don't philosophize. I've just noticed that," Warren responded, unmoved by the sneer.

"You'd better," said Hampden grimly, "stick to banking, where you're at home."

A few minutes later John entered the bank. Hampden greeted him cordially.

"Now don't," he protested jocosely, "make any comment on the heat. It's no use — you'll get no sympathy from Warren here."

"O," John laughed, "nothing ever can put a wrinkle in our glass of fashion." Warren smiled meaning-

lessly. "And that's not such a badly-mixed metaphor either, as you would know if you saw Aunt Roberta's collection of antiques."

"I know," Hampden chuckled. "We've had the antique fever, too."

Warren listened patiently while the other men used up a few minutes in pleasant preliminaries. Hampden told cleverly a humorous story or two which John dexterously tossed back in lively but respectful jibes. It can not be truthfully said that Warren enjoyed the play of humor. He could never understand why men, met for serious purpose, almost invariably preceded business with a period of playful fencing; he preferred to go straight to the point of the meeting, perhaps because he could not fence.

They came at last to the purpose of John's summons.

"I suppose you've heard of our coal proposition?" Hampden suggested.

"Yes."

"There will be a good deal of legal work in connection with it. Is there room among your clients for one more?"

"I might find room," said John soberly, "with a little crowding." Warren, aware that this was humorously intended, permitted himself to smile.

In a few rapid, terse sentences Hampden outlined his plan of organization. Mindful of Warren's prediction and seeing John's face grow gravely dubious, he endeavored to make his explanation quite matter-of-fact.

"Of course," he concluded, "you're familiar with the details. There is nothing new in the plan."

"We don't know much about high finance in New Chelsea. But I read the papers sometimes. It is almost a classic, I should say," John replied.

"Substantially the plan of all promotions," Hampden agreed.

"Let's see if I get you right. You take the options in your own name, agreeing to pay for the coal in stock of your company. Then you agree to turn the properties over to the company for a little more than twice this consideration, out of which you pay the farmers. This gives you control of the company that owns the coal, and it hasn't cost you a cent. The money for development and operating you lend the company, taking as security first mortgage bonds." He hesitated, looking directly at Hampden. "That hardly gives the farmers a square deal, does it?"

The pupils of Hampden's eyes contracted suddenly. "Certainly it does," he answered with some emphasis, "since it converts properties that have been eating themselves up in taxes into a producing proposition. I didn't say," he added carelessly, "that your fee ought, in my opinion, to be about ten thousand — in stock."

"Worth how much?"

"Worth *par*," Hampden answered with conviction. "Eventually."

"Phew! You haven't impressed me as a man who would pay city prices for country butter, Mr. Hampden," John replied thoughtfully. "Just why so much?"

"You will be expected to earn it," said Hampden dryly. "Are you in the habit of questioning fees because they are large?"

"I'm not in the habit of getting large fees. Only I'm not quite clear how you expect me to earn a fee of ten thousand in stock worth par — eventually."

"The usual legal matters — charter, organization, conveyances and so on. And," casually, "helping us to sign up the Deer Township properties."

"They don't like the proposition?"

"They're the only ones who haven't accepted it. They seem to be holding out under the advice of this fellow — Cranshawe, is it?" Warren nodded. "We think you can swing them into line."

"I see," said John thoughtfully. His brow wrinkled in a troubled fashion, as he gazed reflectively out at the clerks sweltering behind the cage. Hampden and Warren waited patiently for his answer.

At last he raised his eyes to Hampden's. "I'm sorry — but I can't do it."

"Why not?" Hampden demanded.

"This fellow Cranshawe happens to be a good deal of a man. He and his neighbors are clients of mine in a small way — and friends also, I think. They do me the honor to trust me. I shouldn't care to advise them in this matter."

"Why not?" Hampden demanded again.

"Let us say," John smiled, "that I am in politics and don't want to complicate my vote-getting."

"That isn't your reason."

"Well," John said regretfully, "if you will have it, it isn't a proposition that I can conscientiously recommend."

"You impeach my honesty?"

"I do not go so far, sir. Honesty is a matter of intent. I think I understand your point of view —

that you will convert their idle coal, as you say, into an income property, and by starting a new industry will indirectly benefit the whole valley. Which is probably true. But the point is that the coal, the one indispensable element in the situation, is theirs, and in return for it they should at least have control."

"The coal has always been there. We furnish the initiative and the brains and the money to make it useful."

"I see that, too. But don't you think initiative of this sort is sometimes — er — overcapitalized? I give you the credit of possessing a higher order of brains than is required to think out this scheme. As for your money, it is secured, amply secured, by first mortgage bonds on property worth four times the loan."

"Humph! Six per cent. never made a rich man. Do you know of any capital that will offer better terms than I do?"

"I do not," John confessed. "And it strikes me," he added gravely, "that you are taking advantage of that fact to gouge —" the word slipped out; he corrected himself hastily —"to drive a close bargain with the farmers."

Hampden abruptly straightened up in his chair. "You may stick to 'gouge.' Do I understand that you refuse the job?"

"I have been trying to explain my reasons —"

"I'm not deeply concerned with your reasons," Hampden remarked shortly. He picked up a document and pointedly began to peruse it. Observing that John did not at once take the hint, he looked up, nodding carelessly. "Oh! Good morning!"

John rose, flushing under the curt dismissal, and went out of the bank.

"I told you so," Warren said.

"Can't you say anything more original than that?" Hampden exclaimed impatiently. Warren couldn't; so he held his peace.

"What I'd like to know," Hampden added reflectively, dropping the document, "is why Murchell let him be nominated. A young lawyer who refuses a big fee for sentimental reasons has no place in Murchell's machine." He was talking to himself rather than to Warren.

But this was attacking what had almost attained the sanctity of a tradition, an institution proudly cherished by New Chelsea! Even by Warren, who had a point of view not shared by his neighbors! "Murchell is a smart man," Warren was moved to protest, "and he likes Dunmeade. And maybe John is smart enough to guess that the stock may be worth nothing — eventually."

Hampden looked at him sharply, but Warren's face was as expressionless as that of the soldiers' monument.

"Well," the capitalist remarked philosophically, "it's Murchell's business, not mine."

That evening Katherine was to be found on the terrace. She was looking particularly well, a fact of which she was not altogether unconscious. Her restlessness, the frequency with which her eyes turned toward the gap in the hedge, the impatient tapping of her foot, may be easily explained: what doth it profit to be beautifully attired when there is no one to admire the result?

She wandered aimlessly into the library where she found her father busy at his desk on which lay a profusion of papers and blue-prints. He nodded abstractedly.

"Still at work, Dad? Don't you ever get tired of it?"

"I guess it's the only thing I know how to do. My generation was never taught to take pleasure seriously. You needn't complain, though." He leaned back in his chair and surveyed her approvingly. "Where are the swains?"

She yawned. "There seems to have been a devastating epidemic. You will kindly proceed to amuse me."

"All this gorgeousness wasted!"

She yawned again. "I was rather looking for John Dunmeade this evening."

"Hence that gown and that stunning new arrangement of the hair? You're not going to fall in love with a one-horse country lawyer, are you?"

There was in her frank, boyish laugh none of that maidenly shyness, that blushing modesty with which novelists delight to bedeck their heroines at the mere mention of love. She sat, knees crossed, on the arm of a chair, her burnished hair and firm white shoulders gleaming softly under the bright light above them. He observed her critically; he was very proud of her and what his money had done for her.

"It is not beyond the bounds of possibility," she laughed. "You know, one can't love a man just because he has money, or social position, or has won distinction. One can do other things to such a man, but not love him — unless he has something else.

Which axiomatic bit of philosophy isn't original with me. So you needn't consider me as an asset."

"I have never considered you as an asset," he replied honestly. "But you can refrain from loving an incompetent, can't you?"

"Yes, I suppose that can be controlled — so long as one remains on this side of a certain point."

"This side? Stay on this side, Katherine."

"Is John an incompetent?" she asked thoughtfully, and promptly answered her own question. "I don't believe it."

"He is. He proved it to-day. I gave him the chance to make some money, more than he is likely to make in five years, and he turned it down — for sentimental reasons! And the worst of it is, he didn't turn it down regretfully but bluntly, quite as though it didn't matter. That sort of man won't go far."

"He has proved it," she said thoughtfully.

"Proved what?"

"He told me once that he didn't care much for money. I thought then he wasn't posing."

"And," Hampden continued the indictment, "he virtually called me a crook."

"Well?"

"Well — what?"

"Are you?" And she added quickly, seeing his look of aggrieved astonishment, "But, of course, I know you aren't."

"I am not," he said emphatically. "I have always kept my operations strictly within the law and that is more than a good many men who aren't called crooks can say. Of course," he went on, "I know perfectly well I'll not be consulted when you come to

marry. You will choose your husband according to your own tastes —"

"I have the right," she interrupted, "since I shall have to live with him."

"Unless I have to support him!"

"You wouldn't have to," she said positively, "even if he were poor. I can do without luxury."

"You think you can," he answered. "You've never had to try; so you don't know how the habit of luxury fixes itself on one. But even if you could do without it, you couldn't be contented with mediocrity. You'd want to be in the thick of things, with a husband who'd wear a number eight hat, who'd have big wants and would put up a big fight to get what he wanted. You couldn't be happy with a man who would be content to go moseying through life, fastidiously rejecting any chance for advancement that didn't suit his antiquated ideas. And if you ever took the bit in your mouth — Lord pity you and your husband!"

"Do you know," she said thoughtfully, "I've been thinking just that. Still, John Dunmeade — we're still discussing him, aren't we? — isn't exactly commonplace. He really has brains, and he is attractive. In politics —"

"He would be out of place. You know nothing of politics. He'd have less chance there than in business. Theoretically, sentiment and lofty ideals and that sort of thing are very pretty, but in fact there's no place anywhere nowadays for your over-finical, sentimental chap unless he happens to possess supreme genius along some line. Dunmeade doesn't — he's merely attractive."

"Most — unaccountably — attractive." Then she laughed — a trifle ruefully, it is true. "I wonder what he would say, if he knew we were discussing him so — he would be shocked, I suppose. I am continually shocking him. He has such nice, old-fashioned ideas about women."

"About everything," Hampden supplemented.

"And we are really anticipating the event. He hasn't asked me to marry him, and he doesn't intend to, I think. He strongly disapproves of me, even while he likes me. He wouldn't know what to do with me if he had me — and I'm afraid I couldn't enlighten him. Heigho!" she yawned and rose. "We haven't been discussing the matter very romantically, have we?"

"Matrimony," said Hampden, "is the most unromantic thing I know of."

CHAPTER V

EXPLORATIONS

A PEOPLE, single-minded and not too critical as to means, was wooing prosperity: the nation ruled from grogshop and magnate's cabinet; the boss, himself — let us do him justice — without sense of moral obliquity, tolerated, respectable almost, as often as not a pillar of the church; little boss serving big boss, big boss serving his corporate monarch, this monarch and others — as royalties will, since blood is thicker than water and interest binds closer than sentiment — banded in a secret confederacy, tacit or explicit, to rule *in perpetuum* — with no one the wiser and no one to care.

Then, overnight it seemed, the same people had become suspicious, insistent, clamorous, lifting red, fearing eyes from the muck to the heavens; uncertainly mouthing eternal principles; reaching awkwardly up toward ancient ideals; from forgotten closets bringing forth faded, moth-eaten banners; furbishing old weapons whose temper and edge neglect had softened and dulled; listening wonderingly to the confusion of tongues, of doctrinaire and quack, of sophist and fanatic and patriot, not quite sure whether it was Babel or Pentecost, but hearing amid the din the summons to battle anew against privilege.

Yet the revelation came not to the nation as to

Saul of Tarsus, in a great white light. In very orderly fashion it came, in rigid conformity to precedent. Before the real leaders, cool-headed, far-seeing, combining caution and courage, came forward to give form and direction to the uprising; before the clamor was even a murmur, before the muck-raker began his Augean task, certain lonely protestants had appeared: young men mostly, audacious egotists who, the people said, thought they were wiser and better than other men, dared to criticize what their neighbors accepted, and presumed to instruct their elders. Tailors Ket, if you please, and Wat Tylers, Long Will Longlands, even gunpowdery Guy Fawkeses, who could not always discern between institutions and men. They believed, poor fools! that if their pasture lands were thrown open and the mill-stones freed again, all would be well once more. They gleaned hope from a barren soil, uttered their passionate protest, were styled for their pains "unpractical" and "common scolds." In the end they were broken, silenced — sadly unaware that in the subconscious memory of men the echo of their protest was still ringing. They are forgotten now.

John Dunmeade was a normally intelligent young man, healthy of mind and conscience, who had never been tempted, hence never tested. He had heard the protestants of his day, of course, but they dealt with problems so remote from his own simple existence that he had carelessly accepted his elders' appraisement of them. He had an ingenuous belief in the greatness and goodness of men who attained high position in life: such men as Senator Murchell. Attacks upon them he dismissed as the splenetic outbursts of disap-

pointed opponents; he had never had occasion to scrutinize their methods closely. His simple mode and code of existence had not acquainted him with the use and need of sophistry; he was not critical of temperament.

From his books and his dreaming in the fields he had evolved his philosophy of life: that wealth was to be won only through industry and production, that men attained distinction only through genius and service, that happiness and content were the crown of fair, clean living, and that dishonesty, cruelty and all other forms of evil, in the end wrought their own punishment. So much he conceded to human frailty that, as no mere man since the fall hath been able fully to keep the commandments of God, all men erred sometimes and some men sinned habitually; but he was willing to believe the world as good as it seemed to him in the retired nook in which his life had been cast. All this, less naïvely put perhaps, he believed and yet he was not a fool. Among the simple folk whose lives overlapped his he had seen nothing to teach him to dig under the semblance of virtue.

Yet he was not unprepared for what befell. His soul had not been blurred by too many impressions of life. To the vigorous mentality of manhood he brought unimpaired the sensitive, elemental honor and interrogative habit of youth. Despite his charity and credulity, he was, when occasion presented itself, quick to see the fundamental verities of the case — as Stephen Hampden had learned.

He was not unambitious, although the spark had smoldered until, apparently from nowhere in particular, had come the suggestion of his nomination.

Then the passion leaped into flame. It was an opportunity to deepen the course of his life, to serve the people! When he perceived the distinct approval with which his neighbors received the suggestion, his heart leaped within him. They were a good, kind people, worthy of the best a man had to give; he would give them of his best! And then, if he should prove a faithful servant in little, perhaps — with unaffected modesty he contemplated the prospect — to him might be committed service of wider scope.

Then the sensitive retina of his soul began to take new impressions. The conceded fact that his nomination came solely by grace of Murchell's and Sheehan's decree caused him vague misgivings. Jeremy Applegate's plaint startled him. Hampden's offer did not tempt, it revolted him. What troubled him most was that these things were done in the light of day and that no one — Jeremy did not count, the victim would naturally protest — seemed to care. Did it mean that the things he questioned were characteristic? Were they justified?

"Am I a prig?" self-doubting.

Other things he learned from his campaigning — things that put him on notice, as the lawyers say.

After careful consideration of his unimposing bank account, John invested a part of it in a horse, despite the teasing of Aunt Roberta who accused him of "joining the cavalry," to-wit, Warren Blake and the troop of undergraduates that clattered over the roads at Crusader's heels. He was not a thoroughbred, blue-ribbon winner, like Crusader, but just a plain horse that, with buggy attached, could trot a mile in something less than five minutes, or, if you weren't par-

ticular as to gait, would bear you in the saddle all day with equal willingness. He was a big, rawboned beast with a Roman nose and eyes continually showing white — which quite belied his placid temper — and John called him Lightning. So John and Lightning, two industrious campaigners, between whom a perfect understanding existed, went about their business of getting votes — and learning.

Lightning's duties generally consisted in standing under the shade of some tree, while John, a volunteer who at least earned his dinner, worked with the farmers in the fields. Glorious days, which the gathering shadows could not altogether rob of their brightness! spent plying his pitchfork with a vigor that allowed no time for problem-solving; breathing the dry, sweet fragrance of new-mown hay, or acquiring dexterity in sheaf-binding after the remorseless reaper had laid low the proudly-bending grain; or, when the "thrasher" came, on the strawstack behind the barn, amid a cloud of flying dust and chaff and the crunching roar, too busy to read a parable in the splendid task of cutter and feeder, as with quick, precise, sweeping grace they fed the maw of the machine. And over the dinner-table or when the day's work was done, John chatted with the farmers. The labor was good for his muscles and digestion, and the chat was good for his soul.

Often he found that Jeremy Applegate or one of Jeremy's fellow scouts had blazed the trail for him. But sometimes he found skeptics who asked pertinent questions.

"Why should I vote for ye?" asked Dan Criswell, a citizen of Baldwin Township, one evening.

They were sitting on Criswell's front porch after supper, John sucking at his pipe and his host enjoying a cigar, memento of Jeremy's visit.

John began to patter the stock Republican arguments, which carried conviction neither to the skeptical Criswell nor — of a sudden — to himself. He broke off abruptly in the middle of a sentence.

"As you say," he laughed uncomfortably. "Why should you vote for me?"

"Does sound kind o' foolish, don't it? Reckon ye won't have nothin' to do with the tariff or the single gold standard ner prosperity neither. A Democrat could be district attorney as good as ye can, pervidin' he's honest an' smart enough. Bein' a Republican won't keep ye straight —'less ye're so nacherly. The hull Republican party won't make ye git after the law-breakers, if ye're cheek by jowl with Jim Sheehan an' he don't want it. What I want to know is, are ye honest — or will ye take orders?"

"That sounds logical," John assented.

"It's common sense. Only most candidates think we're too simple to think on't. An' I don't know as they're far wrong," he added thoughtfully. "Most of us seems to be the kind o' fools they think we are."

When John left, however, Criswell shook hands with him cordially. "I guess I'll vote for ye — this time. I can't swaller the hull ticket, though — stomach wouldn't stand it. Ye look like ye'd be yer own man. Leastways, I'll chance it."

And John replied, troubled, "I won't regard that as a promise. I'm not sure that you ought to vote for me."

Another day he met one Sykes, a hill farmer, a little, wizened fellow who looked as though he had worn himself out in the struggle to wring a living out of the steep slopes. His farm, he explained, would have been a fine one, if only he could "ha' picked it up an' laid it out in some level place." John found him in the barnyard, tinkering at a broken mower.

"Ye're one o' them politician fellers, ain't ye?" he demanded straightway.

"I'm John Dunmeade and —"

"Know all about ye," Farmer Sykes interrupted quickly. "Ye can save yer time an' yer seegars. I ain't votin'."

"I haven't any cigars," John laughed frankly. "If I had, you'd probably pay for them in the long run. But if you smoke a pipe, I'll gladly share my tobacco?" He exhibited a well-filled pouch.

But Sykes, it appeared, indulged in another form of the tobacco habit, and John had to smoke without company.

"I ain't votin'," Sykes repeated churlishly.

"Well," John laughed cheerfully, "if I can't get a vote, I'll be content with information. Will you tell me why you won't vote?"

"Ye can't git aroun' me by palaverin'." The farmer looked up suspiciously from his tinkering. Then he straightened up suddenly, looking John squarely in the eyes. "Well, if ye will have it, Jim Sheehan nominated ye. If ye'd been the right kind o' man, he wouldn't 'a' had nothin' to do with ye."

"But perhaps Sheehan might make a mistake —"

"Not that kind o' mistake. He's too smart fer

that." Into the man's dull eyes crept a sudden hot gleam. "Anybody's he fer, I'm against. I rec'lect when he come to Plumville, nothin' but a drinkin' bum. An' now he's got rich, buildin' bad streets an' roads an' taxin' me heavy to pay fer it while it keeps me scratchin' to git the intrust on my mortgage. How do I know he's crooked? I don't know — I feel it. An' I know that no one gits the Republican nomination, less'n he says so. Or Murchell — an' they're tarred with the same stick."

John's face was grave. "Then you ought to vote the Democratic ticket. I'd rather you'd do that than not vote at all."

The momentary flicker of passion died down. "What's the use?" was the reply, dully given. "However I vote, some feller like Sheehan gits on top." And John went on his way, the twin creases that the summer had stamped between his eyes deepening.

He sought counsel from his father. But to the judge, Cæsar's wife — that is to say, the Republican party and all things thereto appertaining — was above suspicion; not so the motives of him who raised a question. So he took his trouble to 'Ri Cranshawe, the office visitor to whom John's deference had attracted Sheehan's attention, a big man, kindly, shrewd, with wisdom in the raw. He listened sympathetically as John poured out his tale.

"It's like what Sykes says. It ain't what we know — it's what we feel. When Jim Sheehan gits a public contract, we feel there's somethin' crooked about it. When a man gits a nomination, we feel that he's made some kind o' deal with Sheehan.

When we put up a man on our own hook, an' he's nominated — which ain't often — we find he's gone over to Sheehan. An' that ain't feel, it's *know*. Jim Sheehan's represented; we ain't. It ain't right!" He brought one great, gnarled fist into the palm of the other with a report like a pistol shot. "This ain't the Jim Sheehans' country, it's ours — because it's our hands an' our heads that makes it. Yet we can't elect an official without him or Murchell says so. We can't put our hands on nothin', but we know that if we could git down under we'd find things rotten."

"Then why don't you get together and fight?"

"We've got to live," Cranshawe answered simply. "We don't lay by money fast enough to keep us without workin'. We ain't got the time ner the trainin' to make a good fight against him. But the Sheehans, they've got no business but politics an' they're workin' at it all the time. An' we've got no one we can trust to lead us. We've thought we had sometimes, but as I say, we always find he's Sheehan's man in the end. We've got no leader." His eyes, through the bushy brows, rested with an almost wistful light on the troubled countenance before him. "An' it'd take a large-size man fer the job."

John just then felt very small.

He went to Plumville, an ugly, grimy, bustling, growing hive of workers; with its drones, too. He had the key to interpret what he saw. He was permitted to go through the mills and to meet the men; he came out with hands blackened from much contact with their hands, and in the smut he felt a sort of pride. What he had read on the farmers' brown faces he saw on their red, scorched ones; the dull-

eyed suspicion of those used to flattery before election and neglect afterward. Under the careful ciceronage of Sheehan's lieutenants he was led into political club and saloon, where he shook hands with many more men, who guzzled vast quantities of liquor and sneered openly at his abstinence. He was told that here he would meet "men who counted"; he did meet such men,— brutish things, moral idiots, chinless creatures; sly, crafty men; smug, intelligent hypocrites; with the ideals of the brothel, lacking sense of loyalty in the abstract, but bound together by the cohesive force of a common interest — plunder — and hence dangerous, terrible: the sort that one would pass by as life's negligibles, were it not for the almost incomprehensible fact that they through their masters — or their masters through them — guided the destinies of the people. For this army never slept, could always be relied upon.

"What a self-centered beast I have been!" he cried within himself. "All this rottenness under my nose — and I have never perceived it!"

Another night he spent as he had passed the night before Sheehan and Murchell came to offer him that "big place in the life of men"— staring at his vision: not the same splendid, thrilling picture of dramatic struggle and triumph. The detached impressions he had taken during the summer raced before him in endless repetition, so swiftly as to form one continuous living-picture, luminous, revealing. A great fear came upon him; fear of the responsibility of that into which he felt himself being carried.

And there was another thing that deepened those twin creases between his eyes.

One morning a very sleek, high-stepping cob, drawing a very elegant trap, halted before his office, a circumstance of which, you may be sure, New Chelsea took prompt and interested notice. The occupant of the trap waited, calmly ignoring the necks craned in her direction. She did not have to wait long. John's client was somewhat amazed by the abruptness with which their consultation was interrupted.

"Why, hello!" he exclaimed, extending his hand to the visitor. "This is fine!"

She observed him hesitatingly. "It is Mr. Dunmeade, isn't it? Yet I think I should have recognized you anywhere. You haven't changed much, though it has been a long time since I last saw you. — Aren't you ashamed of having neglected me so long?" she concluded indignantly.

"Well, you see, Katherine," he grinned, lamely explanatory, "I've been out campaigning —"

"You might at least have come to report your progress to an interested — constituent. Are you aware that you and I are going over to inspect the new house this afternoon? It's completed, and you've never seen it yet. I don't believe you are interested," she reproached him.

"O, yes, I am. And I'd like to very much," he began. "But I ought to see some men —"

"Do you think," she interrupted him again, "that I've set all the tongues in New Chelsea clacking for nothing? Your campaign can wait. We shall start at two."

He hesitated, then surrendered. "O, hang it all! I've earned a holiday. I'll go."

She beamed brightly on him. "That's nice of

you! And we shall ride. I want to race Crusader against that new steed I've heard so much about."

"O, no!" he protested. "I'm not going to put a good friend in the way of humiliation. The aristocratic Crusader would probably snub him, and Lightning is very sensitive about such things."

"It is time," she insisted firmly, "that Crusader acquired a more democratic spirit. Besides, you've never ridden with me yet. So that's settled. And now I must be going before our friends' necks become permanently twisted. At two, remember!" And the sleek cob was set on its high-stepping way.

A few minutes before the appointed hour New Chelsea saw Lightning — curried as never before in his life — amble in his own peculiar fashion up Main Street to the opening in Hampden's hedge, whence he soon emerged in the company of the satiny Crusader. Over the shady roads they trotted and galloped, Katherine finding much difficulty in restraining her mount, which evinced a strong desire to run away, to Lightning's sober gait. They came after a half hour's ride to a long, straight avenue, once the rain-washed lane to a farm-house, newly graded and graveled and flanked by precise rows of towering poplars.

"It was for the trees we took this place," she told him. "And for the view. Do you wonder?"

They stopped and looked down into the valley lying silent before them like some vast, deserted amphitheater of the gods. The town, seen through the thin, bluish haze of September, seemed sleepier than ever, half-hidden by its trees; the spires of the churches and school-house standing up like exaggerated exclamation points. "Which is perfectly absurd," she

flouted his fancy, "since New Chelsea is nothing so emphatic."

At the end of the poplar-guarded avenue they came upon a fat little man, with a roll of blue-prints tucked under his arm, superintending the laying out of the garden, which, as Katherine explained, was to be formal; "not too formal, of course, just enough to give that quaint, restful effect." But as the garden just then consisted only of badly cut-up turf and many wooden stakes, what it should be when it had attained the desired degree of formality was left to John's feeble imagination. Then they turned their attention to the house, which John discovered was not nearly so large as the long façade, viewed from a distance, had led him to believe.

"Italian, isn't it?" he ventured, not quite sure of his ground.

"Southern Italy," she informed him; "and frankly stolen."

Inside, the decorators — not from New Chelsea — were putting the finishing touches on the last room, and most of the furnishings were in place; so that John had an opportunity to appraise the designers' taste. Silas Hicks, who had the contract to transport the movables from the New Chelsea house, arrived with a load, and as Katherine authoritatively directed its disposal John guessed whose taste had ruled. He found that the *Globe* had done the house grave injustice; it was not at all "palatial" but planned with an eye to comfort and harmony —"livableness," Katherine called it — and marked by extreme simplicity, of the expensive sort, however. Silas was frankly

disappointed, as he found occasion to inform John in an aside.

"It ain't so much, after all, is it? I sorter expected somethin' grand an' imposin'. Yet I bet these fixin's must 'a' cost — say, a couple of thousand?" He eyed John inquiringly. "I don't think much o' the picters, either. Don't seem to have much snap to 'em. There's one, though — I bet Mis' Hicks wouldn't let it in the house It's about a lady — leastways a woman. It's in the settin'-room, 'r librerry, as they call it." He offered to conduct John to it and when the offer was declined for the present, continued in an awe-struck whisper. "But they have five bath-rooms!" Later, John discovered him surreptitiously viewing the picture.

Under Katherine's guidance John was shown the whole house from garret to cellar. At least half of his admiration he gave to his guide. He had never before known her as she was that afternoon, girlish, enthusiastic, absorbed in her woman's task of home-making, never so alluring. For the first time he looked upon her not merely as a girl with whom one might spend a few jolly, flirtatious hours but as a woman with whom a man — some man — might be glad to spend a lifetime. His imagination, which had not been equal to picturing the future garden, began to busy itself with her making a home for — some lucky man.

Afterward they rested on the shady eastern terrace.

"Do you know," she said, "you haven't exclaimed once. Not a single 'Fine!' Or even a 'Bully!'

You're a very satisfactory person — in some ways. Do you like it?"

"Very much," he answered with such evident sincerity that she was content. "But why this air of permanence?"

"Because this is to be home. Of course, we shall be in the Steel City during the winter, with a month in New York for the opera. But this is home. It seems lonely and out of the way now, I suppose, but that won't last long. The Sangers have bought the place next to this. The Flicks, and maybe the Hawes, are coming. We'll soon have our own little colony."

"But Newport and Lenox?"

"Closed chapters."

"And the siege of New York?"

"A foolish expedition from which we have discreetly retreated." Her laugh did not ring quite so free as usual.

"I shouldn't have thought you were the retreating kind."

"I'm not, when it's worth while to go forward. But that — O, I hated it! It was humiliating, toadying to people who despise you for your presumption; swallowing snubs as though you liked them, merely to be able in turn to snub some other silly aspirant." The crimson rushed resentfully to her cheeks, at the recollection of some disagreeable incident, he suspected. He said nothing.

"Thank you for not asking questions. It's foolish for me to be so sensitive about it, but —" she shrugged her shoulders — "our experience wasn't pleasant. I suppose I wasn't constructed to endure it gracefully — I'm still essentially the tomboy, you see. But I'm

fair about it, I think. I've no doubt there are lots of splendid men and women in society there, if only they were accessible. But one can find pleasant, cultured people elsewhere — even among the maligned new-rich. Does that smile mean you think I'm plagiarizing from the classic fox? I'm not. I like the new-rich. I like to meet men who are doing things, who are making their own conquests, not living on the fruits of others' conquests. I know a man — he's only thirty-five — who is already much richer than father and has made his money himself. People are apt to sneer at him as a speculator and call him unscrupulous. But I think he is splendid, because he has had the brains and courage to make his own fight — and win."

He sat silent. To win, always to win, was the sum of this girl's philosophy, with no thought of its cruelty, or realization that for every victor there must be many losers. And wealth, power, the things a man had, were the badge of his victory.

And she had said, "I know a man. . . . I think he is splendid." What meant the sudden pang answering those words?

She was laughing at him. "What do you think when you retire into yourself so rudely? Anything profitable? Or interesting?"

"I'm afraid not. Do you think winning is all of life?"

"Isn't it?"

"No," he cried. "There is the use of strength, if one is strong, to support the weak —" He paused abruptly, conscious of the triteness and futility of his words, with the shyness of the man who, self-con-

scious without conceit, fears to uncover his ideals before unsympathetic eyes.

"O, John Dunmeade," she replied impatiently, "why can't you be practical? Does any one do that and succeed in life? You're so disappointing, with your school-boy platitudes."

He made no answer; the quick red rushed to his face. Why did her impatience make him feel so deeply? And why should she interest herself in his ideals? A long, troubled silence fell between them.

"John," she said suddenly, "was it necessary for you to criticize and quarrel with my father?"

"I did not criticize him," he responded quickly; "and there is no quarrel that I am aware of. We merely differed in opinion on a business matter, each believing he was right."

"Will you tell me why you think him wrong?"

He found his lips sealed. "I haven't criticized him," he said gravely, "and I can't begin now, especially to his daughter. And," he added, smiling, "my part in the matter was so unimportant to him — to you — that it is hardly worth mentioning."

The afternoon was spoiled. Into her face had come a look almost of hardness, like the swift shadow of a cloud over the fields on a sunny day, the absence of which had given her the sweet, frank girlishness. . . . The procession of questions continued. What had he to do with this girl to whom luxury was a matter of course? Why did her impatience with his ideals trouble him? What was he to her but a temporary substitute pending the arrival of the "little colony of our own"?

"Let us go home," she said.

They went to the horses. From the beginning Crusader behaved badly. To enable Katherine to mount John had to lead him to the terrace and stand by his head until she was well seated and had gathered in the reins. He got quickly into his own saddle and they went down the poplar-lined avenue, John watching Crusader's antics with an anxiety Katherine did not share.

"Be careful!" he cautioned her, as they turned into the public road. "That horse wants to bolt."

"I told you he lacks common sense sometimes," she laughed.

As though to illustrate this saying Crusader now began a series of short, cramped plunges, rearing and tossing violently to loosen the steel thing that cut into his mouth. Instinctively John reached for the bridle-rein.

"Don't!" she said sharply. "I am perfectly capable—" He drew back, flushing at his lack of self-control.

She brought her crop stingingly down on the horse's flanks. . . . Crusader broke her grip on the reins, took the bit between his teeth and, head lowered, raced madly down the hill.

Lightning, now an ancient horse, must often recall for the benefit of the arrogant young colts that wild ride when he tried to overtake the fleet thoroughbred. John did not stop to consider the uselessness of risking his own life, too. His arm rose and fell continuously, as he tried to beat more speed into his horse to close the rapidly widening gap between him and the flying Crusader.

A turn of the road took her out of his sight.

Thereafter, to the end of the mad chase, she was always just beyond the next turn. He was not a good rider and the wonder was that, as he swung at top speed around the curves in the snaky road, he was not unseated. Once his horse stumbled slightly, recovered, and galloped on; only John's unconscious grip on the saddle saved him from a bad fall. Lightning's legs doubled and stretched with a rapidity never before and never again attained in his placid life, but to John the space between the pounding, staccato hoof-beats seemed endless. The blood throbbed heavily in his temples, at every turn he closed his eyes, fearing to see a still, broken figure before him. Yet to him just then life meant to find — what he must find.

By a miracle the descent was accomplished without mishap. The road ran on a level for a few hundred yards, then began a long gradual climb of the next hill. Lightning's steps lagged. . . . At a turn in the road, just below the crest, he came upon the panting Crusader, standing with head meekly lowered. Seated on the roadside was Katherine — coolly putting up her hair!

Lightning stopped of his own accord. John's blood rushed to his heart, leaving his face very white. For a moment, in the reaction, the roadside spun around him in a green blur.

"What an anti-climax!" she laughed.

He climbed weakly from the saddle and threw himself down beside her.

"It was glorious, while it lasted," she said.

"Glorious!" he stammered.

"O, I was frightened, too." She held out a hand; it was shaking like an autumn leaf from which the sap

has begun to recede. "But you look worse scared than I felt. What did you think while it was happening?"

He stared at her in a queer, dazed fashion. "I — I am trying to think what I was thinking."

But he knew — he knew!

She looked at him curiously — and then she, too, knew. The knowledge did not displease her. . . . She rose suddenly.

"Shall we go back? The horses will get stiff, standing."

They went slowly homeward, she chatting with a nervous, excited vivacity — of what, he could not have told. He said little.

A wiser than John has confessed his inability to account for the way of a maid with a man. As he was leaving her at her home she said impulsively, "John, I'm sorry I was so nasty about your misunderstanding with father. Won't you tell me what it is about his business you dislike? Perhaps, if I had your point of view —"

But he shook his head.

CHAPTER VI

THE CALL

THE Consolidated Coal Company was a fact, a splendid, epoch-making fact.

The last stubborn hold-out, surrendering to Hampden's skilful negotiations, to necessity and pressure of public opinion, had been led triumphantly into camp — and on Hampden's terms. Among the hills west of town things began to happen under his forceful direction. A spur from the railroad was being constructed. A village of rough shanties was hastily thrown together to house the colony of miners that was to be brought later. If we may believe the *Globe*, a notable ceremony occurred when Hampden himself, amid an interested group of farmers assembled for the occasion, drove the first pick into the outcropping on 'Ri Cranshawe's farm. It was observable that citizens of New Chelsea, speaking of "our town" to citizens of Plumville, had abandoned the attitude of defiant apology for the emphatic accents of pride. In the Square men began to step more briskly. An atmosphere of businesslike haste pervaded the town. The price of real estate promptly advanced; lots on Main Street were held at one thousand dollars — it is true, no purchaser appeared. Visions of expansion, of prosperity, filled the eye.

Cranshawe one day explained to John why he and his Deer Township neighbors had capitulated.

"We got to take what we can git. It takes a lot o' money to develop coal lands. Hampden has it — an' we hain't. Even if we had it, we don't know nothin' about the coal business. An' Hampden was too smart fer us. We found he'd got all the right o' ways. If we could find any one to buy our coal, he couldn't 'a' shipped, 'ceptin' over Hampden's right o' way. I don't like to be held up, but it's my only chance to leave anything fer my children. You can't divide two hundred acres amongst seven an' give much to any of 'em. An' I guess," he added thoughtfully, "if a man's got something the world can use, he hain't the right to hold it back just because he can't make his own terms."

"I hope it will all turn out for the best," said John, fearing — he hardly knew why — that it might not so turn out.

"Seems like," said Cranshawe, "the feller with money has the whip-hand over the feller with something to sell or develop. A man that has money can make money without earnin' it nowadays. It don't seem square some ways. Seems like there's something wrong with our system somewheres. Trouble is, even when we know it's wrong, we don't want to change it, hopin' that some day it'll give us a chanct to make money the same way."

"O, no!" John protested. "I'd hate to believe that. I can't believe it. Men aren't all of the dog-eat-dog species."

"Well," said 'Ri, a little ashamed, "I don't know as I believe it myself. Guess I'm a little peevish over bein' outbargained by Steve Hampden. I wish," he added thoughtfully, "you could be lawyer fer the

company. It looks like us farmers won't have much say in the business. I'd like to have some one on the inside who could tell us what's goin' on."

"No chance of that, 'Ri. Hampden doesn't think much of me." He did not tell Cranshawe why he had lost the capitalist's favor.

The net result of his quixotism, he thought with some bitterness, was to win Hampden's hostility and to put himself out of the way of protecting his farmer friends.

And late in October occurred the Republican rally.

It was necessary to marshal the shaken Republican hosts. For into Benton County had marched a young man who in a single speech broke through the defenses so painstakingly reared by Jeremy Applegate and his fellow soldiers. None other than Jerry Brent. A big, rawboned, homely fellow, uncouth in manner and sometimes in grammar, but with a crude, passionate eloquence that always carried his audience with him. He had been a coal-miner, a labor organizer, and had, after a struggle so common that description stales, been admitted to the practice of law. In all the thirty-five years of his life the charge of material dishonesty had never been raised against him, he was still poor. And he was counted a rising man in the Democratic party; not with the connivance of his party bosses, however. They considered him a radical, unsafe and — cardinal crime in an honest and unmanageable young man! — ambitious. Respectable people sneered at his "antics." It was said that his eyes were fixed on the next Democratic nomination for governor. Even with this suspicion rankling in their minds the bosses dared not — so popular was he among

labor men — refuse him opportunity to speak during the campaign.

John, an inconspicuous listener, heard Brent's Benton County speech. It troubled him; it seemed to him unanswerable. Brent, it was true, dealt in terms of suspicion, not of facts, but it was a suspicion that found a swift echo in the hearts of his audience. He frankly said as much.

"Of course, we don't know all the inside facts of machine government. If we did, the knowledge would make us ashamed of being American citizens. But machines don't breed friends of the people to tell us. But some things are so plain we don't need proof to know 'em. We know that a trust company was smashed and its cashier committed suicide because the politicians through the state deposits were able to manipulate it. We know that no bank can secure state deposits without political pull. We know that the state gets little or no interest on its moneys in those banks, and we can guess that some one else gets the interest the state ought to receive. And that's a little thing. We can forgive them the money they steal. But it ain't a little thing when they steal our right of self-government. *We* don't govern this state. One man — Murchell — picks out our officers and tells 'em what to do while in office. *You* people don't govern Benton County. One man — Jim Sheehan, Murchell's tool — chooses your commissioners, your treasurers, your sheriffs, your district attorneys." John winced. "And it's wrong — my God! it's wrong!" the orator cried passionately. "It would be wrong, even if these men were honest. And I blame you for it. You haven't the right to shove your re-

sponsibility on other men's shoulders, and they haven't the right to take the power. . . ."

The man's hot, rough eloquence found a lodgment where least expected, in John's heart, already sensitized by his own discoveries and questionings. Jerry Brent was right. . . . As John looked at the orator, sweating from his violent gesticulations and shouting, the strong, ugly face often convulsed by his passion, shame burned within him. He wished he had not come to the meeting; his self-esteem did not relish being told what he already knew — that he was being used as a cat's-paw, and for a purpose essentially dishonest.

The oldest inhabitant could not remember when the Republican party had been so vigorously attacked. To stem the tide of revolt — John felt it strongly in his canvass — an old-time rally was to be held in the Square. Sheehan instructed John as to the part which the latter was to play.

"You're to speak. Hit 'er up hard. Tell 'em all about the G. O. P. bein' the friend of the farmer. Feed 'em the tariff. Wave the flag — you know how. It's your chance. Parrott and Sherrod'll be there. Parrott's no slouch of a speaker — but you can beat him. Farmers like a good speech."

"I don't know that I care to make the speech."

"Don't you want to be elected?" Sheehan demanded.

"I guess so. Yes," with sudden vigor and a short laugh that Sheehan did not understand. "I do."

"Well, then —! Play up your independence. Tell 'em there's no strings tied to you."

"I can tell them that — with truth."

Sheehan looked long and hard at him. Then he chuckled. "Of course. And don't forget the state ticket when you're talkin'."

When he was alone, John fairly writhed in his self-contempt and hatred of the boss. "The big beast! He thinks I'm to be one of his puppets, that when I'm elected I'll take his orders as others do. I'll show him! I'll —" He stopped suddenly and fell back in his chair helpless. What would he do? What could he do — he, beneficiary of the man's power?

He prepared a fine speech. And then came the night of the rally — the pomp and panoply of war.

We stand with John under the big elm at the northwest corner of the Square, where Main and North Streets meet. Before us is the rough board speakers' stand, hastily knocked together and liberally bedecked with flags and lithographs of Lincoln and of Beck, the Republican candidate for treasurer. In front are many rows of pine benches. Over all falls the white splendor of the full October moon, to be dimmed when the four kerosene torches guarding the speakers' stand are set flaring and smoking; and by many other lights. On the morrow sundry mothers, surveying oil-stained caps and coats, will decry all electioneering, but to-night no boy need go unhappy; there are torches for all. Some canny-souled youths are more than happy; they have discovered that for the joy of being light-bearers and helping to make this a memorable, gala night in Benton County they can obtain the sum of five cents, thus combining pleasure with profit and taking their first lesson in politics.

Debouching into Main Street from other roads comes a steady stream of steeds, gaunt and strong and

slow-moving as the human freight they draw, shying awkwardly at the lights flashed in their eyes by reckless, mischievous boys. The steeds are safely hitched in various churchyards and the drivers gather in the Square, in shifting, serious groups. Gradually the Square fills. A hoarse hum of voices rises. The air becomes charged with an unnatural excitement — the sense of an occasion! — bred of the strange lights and bustle and the presence of many men. John, between handshakes, has time to feel it. His lagging soul, jaded by much questioning, leaps forth suddenly responsive. These men are — the people. The power of it — the power and the glory! He thrills under a sense of oneness with them. Murchell and his machine, Sheehan and his control, seem far away, unreal, impossible.

Jeremy Applegate does not thrill. Jeremy is worried. Many on his list have heard Brent's speech and are wavering, may even break the promise made to their "comrade." He is wearing a faded blue uniform with a little bronze button in the lapel of the coat and, as he limps hurriedly from group to group, his hand often seeks the pocket where repose the eloquent cigars. He leaves behind him a wake of fragrant tobacco and kindly glances.

The hand at last finds a depleted pocket. Jeremy limps hastily over to John, who stands for the moment lost in his dreaming.

"Got any cigars, John? I'm out."

John descends from dreams to tobacco, which is real and, it seems, indispensable. He makes a fruitless search. "Nary a one. Can't you campaign without cigars, Jeremy?"

"They expect 'em. I'll have to go to the drug-store."

But John stops him. "Jeremy, how much have you spent for cigars this campaign?"

"More'n thirty dollars, I expect," sighs Jeremy.

"Come around to-morrow and I'll make it up to you."

Jeremy's eyes suddenly fill in his gratitude, but he shakes his head. "You can't afford it."

"Can you?" Jeremy thinks of the dress that Mrs. Jeremy needs so badly and is silent. But he does not forget his cause.

"Give me part of it now — I can get more cigars."

John's protest dies in a half laugh. He fishes forth a bill and gives it to Jeremy, who, overcome by this windfall, can only mumble, "Thank you."

John nods toward the gathering crowd. "Great, isn't it? Makes a man feel —"

But Jeremy, the war-worn, is not impressed. "Huh! Means nothin'. Speeches don't do any good."

"Brent's did."

"Yes," Jeremy answers bitterly. "He had somethin' to say. Fer God's sake, Johnny, give 'em somethin' to think about! Give 'em a reason!"

John remembers the carefully-conned speech in his pocket and suddenly flushes. He watches Jeremy limp up the street toward the drug-store. Jeremy, too, is of — the people.

"Cuttin' a melon, bo? I'm willin'," a coarse voice behind him laughs familiarly.

John turns to survey the speaker, a big, hulking man, pot-bellied, bow-legged; a short, thick neck sup-

porting a round, small head; little, furtive eyes out of which a brave soul never looked. John recoils from his familiarity.

"Barkis is willin'," the coarse voice laughs again.

"Who are you?" John asks curtly.

"I'm Butch Maley, sonny, an' me pocket has that empty feelin'," the man grins affably. "Saw you handin' it out to the peg-leg."

"I was — paying a debt."

"Sure! Pay me a debt, too."

"I owe you nothing."

"You will before election's over." The rough laugh grates on John's nerves. "An' the boys is havin' a blow-out to-morrer night — somep'n on you'll taste good."

"You're at the wrong place, my friend." John's disgust is evident. "I've no money for you." He turns away.

But the man puts forth a rough hand to detain him. "Guess you didn't hear who I am. I'm Butch Maley."

"You look it."

"Don't git fresh, kid!" The heavy, sensual face is lowering. "I'm Butch Maley — fourt' precinc', fourt' ward. See? Guess you don't know what that means?"

"Nothing pleasant, I'm sure. And take your hand from my shoulder," John replies sharply, as he turns away from the profanely-growling man. The gross creature has irritated him unreasonably. Butch Maley, too, is of — the people.

But, hark! From down by the station comes the strident shriek of a locomotive. It is the train bearing

the candidates and the Plumville delegation. There is a lull of a few moments; we wait impatiently, knowing that the procession is forming. Then on the air rise the distant strains of *Marching Through Georgia* played by the Plumville brass band. We thrill — who could help it? The strains come nearer, clearer. The procession wheels with more or less precision into Main Street. First, the red-jacketed band playing lustily — it is *John Brown's Body* now — and surrounded by jubilant young Lucifers, the stalwart drum-major performing miracles with his baton. Then the speaking party — John ought to be of it — seated in three open barouches festooned with bunting. And then the Plumville Fourth Ward Marching Club, twirling red, white and blue umbrellas and smoking unanimously: slack-jawed, bleary-eyed fellows most of them, useful only for voting and for purposes of display, camp followers; their souls would rattle lonesomely in a pea-shell. John surveys them with disgust. And yet these also are of — the people. Characteristically, as they approach the Square, they break ranks and rush to get front seats. The fumes of their cigars rise to mingle with the rancid smell of burning kerosene.

The candidates, properly acclaimed, and their party of distinguished citizens are on the platform. The benches are filled; around them stands a fringe of men, mostly farmers, who in the rush for seats have been too slow. John, sandwiched in between Sheehan and Congressman Jenkins, looks out over the audience, a strange question in his eyes; he is seeking a "reason," as though it were to be found written on the faces of the men before him.

The speaking begins. After a short preliminary speech the chairman introduces Beck, candidate for treasurer, as inconsiderable now as he will be when in office. Then comes Parrott, a famous corporation lawyer whose features somehow suggest that he is well named; he is adept in the use of those phrases which elicit enthusiasm but do not convince. After him Mark Sherrod, state senator, a tall, suave man with a magnetic something about him; one of his eyes has a slight cast and gives his face a sinister expression which not all his undoubted attraction can remove. He is a coming man; already a power in the big eastern city, it is whispered that he is planning to succeed Beck in the treasurership. And after him the Honorable G. Washington Jenkins, congressman from the district, Lincolnian in figure, shrill and nasal of voice, but with the old campaigner's fund of stories and a rough-and-ready eloquence that catches the crowd.

The old trees in the Square might smile, had the Almighty equipped them with a facial apparatus, as the familiar shafts of oratory hurtle through their gnarled branches. Once more we are in the throes of civil war, the earth trembles 'neath the tread of mighty armies. Cannons roar,— that smoke rising from the kerosene torches and cigars may well be the thick, white pall of the battleground. The cold shivers chase up and down our spine as we gaze upon fields wet with blood. Nobly the speakers repulse the gray-clad hosts on Cemetery Hill, clamber up the embattled slopes of Vicksburg, force their iron way through the thick Wilderness. The hozannas of four million odd freedmen fill the air. The grandeur of Lincoln is a

fruitful source of eloquence; his spirit dwells with us, it seems. The fertile fields of the West are opened and made to bring forth their bountiful yield before our eyes; by some mysterious process of reasoning this triumph of civilization is due to the genius of the Republican party.

The tariff is matter for much pride; we are pointed to a thousand smokeless chimneys — reference is to the late panic — standing mute but eternal witnesses to the fallacy of Democratic doctrine. We are solemnly warned against the evil of voting for the fifty cent dollar. The hungry are invited to receive a " full dinner pail "— a brand new slogan. If any virtue is not claimed for our party, it is an oversight that will be corrected by the next speaker. We almost feel the presence of Omnipotence as the Honorable Wash Jenkins fervently adjures us to cast our votes for " the party of progress, the party of conservatism, of wisdom and courage and power, the party of the farmer, the manufacturer, the laborer — of the people,— the party of Prosperity! — the party of Lincoln, who said that ' government of the people, by the people and for the people shall not perish from the earth.' "

The front seats roar their approval. From the fringe of farmers, Jim Sheehan observes, comes only grim silence. There is an uneasy sense that Jerry Brent's suspicions have not been answered.

Through it all John sat, hardly moving. But within him was tumult. He was contrasting the grandiloquent, virtuous phrases with the Machine as he had seen it. And he knew that in the Jeremys, the Maleys, the devious devices of which he could not help hearing hints in his campaigning, he had caught but a

glimpse of the thing — the Machine. He did not believe that good employs evil to its ends; by its agencies a cause was to be judged. He sighted along the line of those who profited by it — Sheehan, Beck, Parrott, Sherrod, Murchell — the line was lost in the mist of his incomplete knowledge. This knowledge, his rankling suspicions, Brent's questionings, rose up to confront him, demanding like Jeremy a "reason." He could not find it. And the people, the sturdy, patient, hard-headed men out there — were they such dolts as to be fooled by the hollow mockery being enacted before them? He could not believe it. And yet he — he who doubted — was expected to play a part in the mockery, to give the lie to his inner consciousness, to befog the issue in the minds of the listeners, to take his place in the ranks of the Machine. The speech in his pocket burned to the skin.

The tumult was still raging when the Honorable Wash Jenkins concluded his florid peroration and the applause died down. Vaguely, as from a distance, John heard the chairman introduce "New Chelsea's candidate" and the sudden cheers that rose. He did not realize, although Parrott and Sherrod did, that in the cheers was a quality not felt in the other greetings that night. He rose mechanically. He hardly knew when Sheehan, grasping his arm, shouted into his ear, "Don't forget the state ticket. Play it up hard!" He walked to the front of the platform; the cheers redoubled, then subsided. The fringe of farmers pressed forward a little.

He stood silent before them. The well-conned speech, with its smooth periods, the dramatic climaxes to which his clear, flexible voice lent itself so beauti-

fully, refused to be uttered. He could not speak the lie he had prepared; a "reason" he had not. His silence compelled silence, the tense stillness of wonderment that spread even to the boys on the outskirts of the crowd.

At last words came, in a dry, suppressed voice. He did not mean to be facetious, and no one laughed at his grave, protesting irony.

"We have heard to-night of the past glories of our party — and of glories that are of the nation. I shall not repeat, lest repetition dull their point. I have been asked not to forget the state ticket, in fact, to play it up hard. I need hardly speak for the gentlemen who have so eloquently spoken for themselves. I presume they do not wish to be saddled with responsibility for any of my shortcomings, nor do I wish to be judged by theirs. I am a candidate for office. If you think me the sort of man to administer that office honestly and well, without fear or favor, and *as my own man,* I shall be happy. If you don't think that, you can't believe that any party's history will make me an honest official. And — that's all I can say."

He turned and walked toward the rear of the platform. The silence continued. Slack jaws fell slacker. The fringe of farmers stood motionless, bewildered, slow to grasp the significance of the short speech. Through the silence the voice of Jim Sheehan, first to recover presence of mind, carried over the crowd to Main Street.

"For God's sake, start a tune or something!" This to the band.

Some one laughed. The band began to play *When Johnny Comes Marching Home,* of all tunes! Peo-

ple began to rise from their seats; it was not necessary for the chairman to announce the end of the meeting.

On the stage John faced a wrathful tableau,— Parrott, Sherrod and Sheehan. "What the hell —" began Sheehan, but the suave Sherrod, minus his suavity, interrupted, "What do you mean? If you can't support the ticket, you had no right to speak at all. You abuse courtesy, young man."

"Not yours, at any rate," John answered, and walked from the stage.

He made his way quickly behind it and out around the crowd. He was dazed by his own act. He had one desire, to get away by himself where he could think out the significance of the thing that, driven by something uncontrollable within him, he had done. A heavy sense of treachery was upon him, yet he could not have done otherwise. He had not eyes for the curious glances, many of them more friendly than he could then have believed, cast toward him.

On the edge of the crowd he met Jeremy, a frightened yet exultant Jeremy.

"Jeremy!" He read accusation on the troubled old face. "I'm sorry. I couldn't help it — I couldn't find the reason."

"Sorry!" Jeremy leaned closer, until his face was not two hands' breadth from John's. "The county'll prob'ly go Democratic — but you're a man. You didn't tell a lie for a job, anyways."

Jeremy turned away, to see Farmer Sykes' wizened, sardonic face leering at him.

"That's it, Jeremy," the dry voice cackled. "Give it to 'im, give it to 'im *hard*. What right's he got to have a soul?"

Jeremy shrank away into the crowd, frightened, glad that he had not been overheard. No one must know that he, too, for a moment had reclaimed his own soul, lest the precious job be taken from him.

John, walking swiftly with eyes cast down, would have passed without noticing the fashionable trap in front of his home, had not a voice from it called to him.

"John, John!"

CHAPTER VII

THE WILDERNESS ROAD

HE stopped and stared at her in astonishment. "Katherine! What are you doing here?"

"Listening to the speeches, of course. O, you needn't look so surprised — I've been well chaperoned, thank you, between Williams here and Miss Roberta. And it has been such fun! We stood under the trees on the edge of the crowd, where we could hear the speakers and the comments of the farmers. Miss Roberta? O, she has fled into the house, afraid to be caught showing an interest in her wonderful nephew. Isn't that just like her? Don't tell her I've tattled."

"But I don't understand why you should want to come."

"You're so stupid sometimes," she sighed impatiently. "To hear you speak, of course. I've always wanted to. I wanted dad to come along, but he said no, his interest in politics was practical, not sentimental, and he preferred to take his vaudeville straight. He was in quite a bad humor because I wanted to come. But — I am here."

"I wish you hadn't come," he said, still in a daze.

"That's kind, I'm sure." She tossed her head in burlesque hauteur. "Instead, you might offer to drive home with me. Williams can stay here and drive back when you return."

He shook his head. "I'd better not," he muttered. He still wanted to get away by himself to think.

"Please!" She leaned forward and urged him softly. "It's our last chance for a good chat. We go away to-morrow morning."

He tried honestly to resist, feeling instinctively that for him she spelled danger and that every hour with her added to the danger. But he made the mistake of looking at her. Always she was revealing some new charm for him and, despite his inner warning, now bred in him a sort of recklessness. When she resorted to appeal, the charm became doubly alluring. And in the fitful half-light from the torches in the Square, her eyes bright with excitement and an eager interest that he felt was new, she was to him very beautiful, very desirable. He called himself a weakling, a fool that played with fire.

And, so styling himself, he assented.

"Then," she said, eminently practical, "you'd better go get your overcoat. Miss Roberta has been fretting all evening because you weren't wearing one. And I don't care to answer to her, thank you, if you catch your death of cold."

He obeyed, subtly flattered by her care. Soon they had left the town behind them and were bowling along the moonlit road. She drew the impatient cob down to a leisurely trot, so slow that homeward-bound farmers occasionally passed them with ease.

John, letting the rally and the problem it presented drift into the background, gave himself up to a reckless enjoyment of the hour. The white splendor of the moon undimmed by smoky torches, the silent majesty of the hills with their shadows and silvery

sheen, alone were real. The crowd of faces peering intently at him through the half gloom, the struggle within him as he stood before them, his ironic rejection of the part assigned him, seemed unreal, creatures of a fantastic dream.

And the girl beside him, like him smitten into silence, was real, very real. Once, driving over a stone, she swayed against his shoulder; a current of fire swept through him, mounting intoxicating to his brain.

Suddenly she broke into a laugh, a low, subdued laugh. "So we add a moonlight excursion to the list of our adventures. We shall have all hours of the day to remember, shan't we? It seems," she added complainingly, "that I must always take the aggressive. But then you never hunt me out — so what can I do? I suppose most people would call me unwomanly. Do you think me that?"

"I do not," he answered unsteadily. "You can't expect the beneficiary to be critical."

"Do you mean that, I wonder? Or is it only your nice way of letting me down easily? But I am not conferring, I am seeking. A — a friendship — such as ours — means a great deal to me." Her voice dwindled away into silence.

He could not understand, even in his recklessness could not accept at its face value, her sudden new gentleness. He was not so stupid as not to know that during the summer she had singled him out for her favor. But he had not the monstrous egotism which enables a man to believe that every woman who looks kindly upon him is making love to him. He had no theories of woman as the huntress. But he was hard put to it to keep a tight grip on himself, to fight down

the longing surging within him. Insistently he tried to think of her as she was, an unformed woman of essential selfishness, of generous caprices. He had not yet found the solution to the problem presented to him by his campaign, but he felt blindly that it was leading him into paths whither she would not follow, into which he, if he yielded to his longing, would not — could not — go alone. He had sometimes thought he felt in her that which would carry her to great heights; yet he knew she was now of the earth, earthy. He feared her, feared that in a contest of souls she would prove the stronger. And, besides, the new hope called forth by her new gentleness was absurd. She was a creature of luxury. He thought of his last year's income and laughed unpleasantly.

"Why this sudden hilarity?" she demanded.

"It's a joke I've just thought of — you wouldn't appreciate it."

She looked at him intently. He averted his gaze.

"Are you sure I shouldn't?" she asked.

"Quite," he answered.

"Was it," she pressed him, "was it about your speech to-night?"

"Indirectly, I suppose," he replied, still looking the other way, willing that she should think the rally the cause of his mirth.

"Will you tell me about that? It was the reason — one reason — why I wanted you to come home with me. I'm of two minds about it. Of course, I didn't understand what it was all about, except that you were expected to say far more and something different. Any one could see that the men on the platform were angry. But one had the feeling that somehow you

were finding and asserting yourself — doing something rather splendid. I know it made Aunt Roberta begin to snuffle — she said it was a cold in her head. I heard one man near us — a big, hulking farmer — say, 'By Joshua! I always thought there was consider'ble of a man under that white skin of Johnny Dunmeade's.' He didn't mean to be funny, I think. Another, a different sort of man, laughed and said, 'Now that's the cleverest move yet. He's had the wit to size up the situation in this county and kick himself loose from a rotten ticket. It's a grandstand play, but it'll make him if he's big enough to follow it up. It'll get him a following.'"

She looked up at him inquiringly. He saw again the eager interest in her eyes.

"It was neither splendid nor crafty," he said grimly. "I was expected to rant and lie about the virtues of candidates I've no faith in, cover up a lot of things that, it seems, can't be answered. I had that speech ready. But when it came to the point I couldn't say it. That's all."

"But I can see," she said reflectively, "how that might mean finding yourself. But the man was right — it will make you?"

Her interest was explained, he thought bitterly. It was the cynic's observation that had interpreted the speech for her.

"More likely the contrary," he answered. In the bright moonlight he could see her face fall. "Sheehan and the organization will probably knife me under cover and beat me."

"O, surely not! I don't know much about politics, of course, but I should think, if your speech has made

you friends, they would be the more apt to stand by you."

"I don't know much about politics either," he said dryly, "but I am learning. This is very simple. I suspect they nominated me only to bring strength to the state ticket. Now that I've put it out of my power to help it, in fact have publicly refused to support it, they'll punish me — if only as a horrible example to the next young man who happens along with a working conscience."

"Why," she exclaimed incredulously, "that would elect a Democrat, wouldn't it?"

"I'd have been as incredulous myself five months ago."

"But Senator Murchell won't allow it, surely."

"Senator Murchell will be the first to recommend the knifing," he laughed shortly. "I begin to suspect that the senator is a false god."

"What have you against the candidates?"

"It's rather against the forces behind them. Bad methods and general suspicion, I guess. I probably couldn't make it clear."

"Just that? I do not think," she said slowly, "that I like it, after all. I'm disappointed in — for you."

"Would you have me lie? For that's what it would amount to."

"O," she cried, "that's not a fair way to put it. I'm so ambitious for you! That's unwomanly, too, I suppose, but I don't care! I am ambitious for you. And I do so admire the men who get along! And in politics you could go so far. You have Senator Murchell's friendship. You don't know how much he admires you. And you have brains and popularity.

Everybody says that; even father admits it. Then why make enemies needlessly? Of course, it's fine to use one's power for good, but one must get the power first. And I — Do you know what I would do, if I were a man like you? I would go into politics seriously. I would master methods and conditions and adapt them to my purpose. I would keep on until the organization — I know something about organizations; I've been quizzing Senator Murchell this summer — was mine. And then, when my power was secure, I would remove, little by little, the evils I saw, and when I had finished and measured my compromises against the good I had done, I know the balance would be in my favor. And, after all, in life, isn't good or evil merely a question of balances?" Her eloquence was inspiring.

But he merely smiled bitterly. "And I suspect that by the time I'd got the power in the fashion you describe, I'd have become the sort of man that doesn't use his power for good."

"I suppose," she sighed, "there's no use arguing with you. Dad said you are the sort of man that will do good in his own way or not at all."

To this he maintained a grim silence.

"What are you going to do about it?"

"About the election?" He shrugged his shoulders in indifference. "Let 'em beat me, I suppose. I haven't thought ahead as far as to-morrow."

"O, well, it's done anyway, so we needn't argue about it. I wish," she cried impatiently, "I were either more or less selfish. I suppose you think me wholly selfish?" He looked at her quickly, surprised at the almost wistful inflection.

Yet he thought a moment before answering, "Not wholly selfish."

"But you're cudgeling your brains to find evidence that I'm not, and can't." Her laugh rang out unpleasantly. "That wasn't a very tactful answer, was it? I can give you one bit of evidence, though. Now that it's all over, I can admire your refusing to make that speech. It was splendid in a way. You see, I can appreciate unselfishness in the abstract or when it can't be remedied."

"I told you that wasn't unselfish; it was involuntary," he insisted. "But I can add to the evidence — your kindly, even if mistaken, interest in me and my future. And you mustn't sneer at yourself," he added gravely.

She turned to look fairly into his eyes. "Do you still think it necessary to let me down easily?" she asked quietly.

He drew a sharp, whistling breath. Bewildered, he stared at her, brain rocking, heart leaping convulsively, as he realized the import of her words. His body became rigid, nails biting into palms, in the effort not to take her in his arms. For, without reasoning, he knew that to accept now what she, unasked, had offered would be to place himself in her power. And that he dared not!

For a long moment their eyes clung; then at the same instant they both looked hastily away.

The silent minutes lengthened, as the cob drew them slowly up the face of East Ridge. Behind them lay the valley, always beautiful, never so wondrous as in the pallor of night; but they looked steadfastly ahead.

To his credit be it written, John did not think carpingly of her boldness — let us use the word he used, courage. His longing was not lessened because she had abandoned the woman's weapon of indirection for the man's frankness. Yet his hold on himself did not relax; it became even the more secure. And he wondered at the strength now revealed within him, able to resist the temptation of her. Her shallow, immature sophistry he cast aside as inconsiderable; she herself was the temptation, a continuing temptation, he foresaw. He knew all that she was, and he knew, too, that he desired, would always desire her above all good things that life holds; yet between them stood an ideal that was still essential to him. And he believed that he had strength to put her — the temptation — away from him. He believed that she could not have made him speak the part assigned to him in the farce of the early evening. He felt that she could not deter him from — what?

He put aside his self measuring. From what? What was he to do that made impossible the taking of this girl by his side, his to take?

He had said in answer to her question, "I don't know. Let them beat me, I suppose." He suddenly knew that was not true. The challenge flung down when his soul, flogged by his gathering knowledge, had become articulate, must be sustained. He could not let himself be swept aside through cowardly default. He must make his fight.

A warm glow enveloped him, his blood quickened. He straightened up, throwing back his shoulders, as though to brace himself for a physical conflict. He spoke aloud.

"I will fight them."

She turned to look at him again. "You have thought as far ahead as to-morrow," she said steadily.

"Further than that."

They turned into the road that runs along the crest of the Ridge. The horse, left to its own gait, trotted swiftly the mile to the Hampden place and up the poplar-lined driveway. The two in the trap sat silent.

When he had helped her to alight, both her hands were in his. He did not release them nor did she seek to disturb his clasp. She met his gaze unfalteringly.

"Listen!" he said gently. "I didn't know that you cared. I, too, care; far more than you will believe."

"I know you care," she answered simply. "And why you won't — take me."

"I have known it ever since our ride," he went on. "That is why I have not seen you since. And — a poor man has not the right to do more than ask a woman used to luxury to share his life; he must not try to persuade. And he has not the right to ask any woman, unless she can sympathize with him, help him in his work. If she couldn't, it would bring her unhappiness and destroy his work. You — I — we are not — in sympathy. And a man's work, his place in life, must come first. I have been led into something. I can't see its end, but I feel that it could never bring happiness to a girl who cares deeply for prestige and power and the things that money buys. You know that, too — that's why you have been pointing me to a different ideal."

"If I could only be sure of myself!" she cried.

"You are so many things that I care for, and you refuse to take — so many things that I care for."

"The things that you care for can be had only at the expense of the things that are — that I hope are — indispensable to me. I don't mean to be priggish."

"You aren't priggish," she answered quickly. Then she went on, "I wonder, can one make oneself over? I wish now that I could. But then perhaps that is only because it is — now. This isn't a very happy moment, is it, for either of us? And it's less happy for me than for you.— Perhaps to-morrow, when I weigh you against the things I have and want, I shall find you lacking." She tried to smile.

He made no reply. He, too, was wondering, Could she make herself over? Could he make her over? Then he put the thought hastily away; his strength, not yet fully tried, could not be trusted so far. Their hands fell apart. He stood awkwardly before her for a moment, then turned as though to leave.

"Are you going to relinquish me wholly?" Her voice was still steady, but in the moonlight her face was very white. "Don't! I — this summer — to-night — you have aroused in me longings for something different. Perhaps I may yet become big enough to be happy with what you can give me — with you."

He was trembling. He had to steel himself again before he could reply. "I can't let myself hope that you will come. But if you come, it must be without persuasion from me. You must understand that."

She went a few steps up the stairs toward the terrace. Then she stopped and faced him again.

"I know you care," she answered simply

"Good-by. And thank you for not humiliating me, for saying that you cared." She said it without a quaver.

She paused an almost imperceptible moment. But he gave no answer. She resumed the ascent.

"Good-by." He got into the trap and drove away without once looking back. She stood on the terrace watching him until he turned out of the driveway into the road.

"John, John!" she whispered. "Why didn't you take me — in spite of myself!" Then she went into the house.

In the hall she found her father, reading. He looked at her sharply.

"You look done out. It was a fool errand. What's Williams driving out again for?"

"It wasn't Williams," she answered. "John Dunmeade came home with me."

"Humph!" he growled. "You'll be making a fool of yourself over that fellow yet, if you're not careful."

"No, I won't," she said wearily. "He won't let me. He doesn't want me. I virtually proposed to him to-night and he virtually told me I am a selfish pig."

"Eh?" His newspaper dropped from his hands and he stared, open-mouthed, at her. "The devil you did! Well, all I've got to say is, you got out of it luckier than you deserve."

"And I suspect he is right. O, why didn't you bring me up differently?"

Again he looked at her sharply. "It's a good thing we're going away to-morrow. You go up-stairs to

bed. And when you say your prayers, thank the Lord that I've brought you up to be what you are and that you aren't going to be the wife of a one-horse country lawyer."

His tone was more vigorous than pious.

CHAPTER VIII

ACROSS THE BORDER

THE next morning at the breakfast table Judge Dunmeade sat in a frigid but eloquent silence. It was perhaps well that he had acquired a wholesome respect for his sister's tongue and that she was present to police the occasion.

When they rose, John began, hesitatingly, "Father, last night —"

"It is too late for regrets, sir."

"I am not exactly regretting. But I felt an explanation —"

"Can you," the judge interrupted coldly, "explain away the fact that you have betrayed the party that honored you, cast discredit upon William Murchell who has given you his friendship, upon me who — can you explain that?"

John shook his head. "I thought I could. But, now, I'm afraid not."

The judge's lips parted, then closed firmly as though he could not trust himself to speak. He raised his hand in a gesture in which grief and hopelessness were blended and, turning, stalked slowly from the room.

John smiled uncertainly. "I'm afraid, Aunt Roberta, your bones were a true prophet."

She sighed assentingly. He went out to face his neighbors — an ordeal.

New Chelsea was rent in twain — nay, into many divisions — by John's speech; its honest but partizan soul sorely troubled. Only the few lone Democrats found humor in the situation. There were those whose vocabulary proved sadly unequal to their bitterness against his shameless apostasy. Grocer Bellamy, for instance, after having held forth at length concerning Arnolds and Burrs to the knot of men awaiting the morning mail turned an eloquent back upon the arriving John. A goodly minority were equally vociferous in defense. Cobbler Marks, who had stepped out of his little shop for his improbable mail and the certain bit of gossip, quite forgetting that he had not put off his leather apron, pointedly took John's arm and walked a block with him. The enmity between grocer and cobbler dated from that instant.

The largest number, torn betwixt liking for their young neighbor and the mental discomfort of those whose traditions have been rudely jolted, withheld judgment until they could see what befell. Among the farmers was no dissension; a sudden lifting of heads, a still half-unbelieving rejoicing that the young fellow, who as he sweat with them in the fields asked questions, had dared to voice their protest.

The *Globe,* stanchly Republican, made no mention of John's part in the rally save the unconsciously humorous sentence, "Attorney John Dunmeade also spoke."

Later, not greatly uplifted by the doubtful honor of being a bone of contention, John was alone in his office, smoking furiously, brow wrinkled, feet propped on the table. A heavy tread in the outer room announced the arrival of a visitor. Without knocking

the new-comer flung open the door and strode into the office. His hat was pushed back on his head; an unlighted cigar stuck out at an aggressive angle from the corner of his mouth. He surveyed John in mingled anger and disgust. John, not rising, sighted over lazy feet.

"Good morning, Sheehan," he said with a pleasantness that would have carried a warning to a calmer observer than the boss.

Without invitation Sheehan sat down. "Well," he growled, "you played hell, didn't you?"

"I tried to," John smiled. "Do you think I succeeded?"

"When a young feller like you," Sheehan declared, "thinks he is better than his party, he's got a lot to learn."

John considered this statement for a moment. "I do not," he concluded, "think I am better than my party."

Sheehan caught the point. "Huh! Guess you don't know who the party is."

"That's just what I'm trying to decide. Perhaps you can enlighten me?"

"I can. A party," Sheehan spoke with intense conviction; "a party is those that control it."

"Then in Benton County you're the party?"

"*Egg*sactly! Me and Murchell."

"Then, modestly, I do think I'm better than the party," John responded, still pleasantly. "And, as you say, I've a lot to learn. Have you come to teach me?"

"Say, hain't you no respect for my position in this county?"

"For your position, a great deal. For you — none at all."

Sheehan grinned in spite of himself.

"I like your nerve! That's what makes me sore," he went on reproachfully. "I like you. I was glad to do you a favor. I gave you a chance to get in strong with us. And you go and beef it by throwin' down the state ticket. What in hell did you do it for?"

"I'm afraid you wouldn't understand, Sheehan. It's a question of ideals."

Sheehan snorted. "Ideals — hell! I know all about 'em. What's ideals? Can you eat 'em? Can you wear 'em? Can you stuff 'em into your pants pocket like this?" He illustrated by drawing out a fat roll of bills. "Will they get you votes?"

"Possibly not."

"Possibly not! Say," the boss leaned forward and argued earnestly, "I talk a lot of foolish talk, but I'm smart enough to know the game. When I came to Plumville fifteen years ago all I owned was the shirt on my back. Now I can buy out any man in Benton County exceptin' Steve Hampden and Murchell, and when they want anything here they're glad enough to come to me and make it worth my while to give it to 'em. *I didn't get it by havin' ideals.* I've seen a lot o' young college fellers like you goin' in politics with 'em. Well, they're in the boneyard now. 'Relse, when they want anything, they come to fellers like me. Ain't that so?"

"I have reason to believe that's been true."

And how true! John thought, judging from his narrow experience. Was it possible that the seats of

"Can you stuff 'em in your pocket like this?"

the mighty were reserved only for the Murchells, the Hampdens, the Sheehans? He thought disgustedly of the coarse, brutish thing before him. Yet Sheehan could command his retinue of Jeremys and Maleys! He looked up suddenly. "Sheehan, who is Butch Maley?"

"And that's another thing that makes me sore," Sheehan resumed his reproachful air. "You threw Butch down last night and it cost me fifty to square it. That's no way to play politics. Who's Butch Maley? He's the fourth precinct, fourth ward, that's what he is, and it's the biggest precinct in the city. He's the whole works, voters and election board."

"You mean, he monkeys with the count?"

"I mean," replied Sheehan significantly, "that when we need a few votes, we can always get 'em from Butch's precinct."

"I see. I've heard of those precincts. H-m-m! Sheehan, I don't think you're as smart as you think you are."

The boss observed him suspiciously, but his question was forestalled.

"Well!" John brought his feet to the floor and sat upright. "What did you come to teach me?"

"I come to give you another chance. You can give an interview sayin' that you was misunderstood, that you're for the state ticket strong and want all your friends to vote for it."

"Is that an order or a request?"

"Whichever you please," Sheehan answered shortly.

"And if I don't do it?"

"There's a Democrat runnin' for district attorney."

"Why, Sheehan!" John simulated reproachful

surprise well. "Surely you wouldn't go back on your party! — But I forget, you're the party, aren't you? I suppose Simcox belongs to the party, too." Simcox was John's Democratic opponent. "And if I do?"

"Then you'll win."

John got leisurely to his feet. His visitor also rose. "Sheehan, you're lying. You'll knife me in any case. Well, I won't do it. So go ahead and beat me — if you can."

"If I can!" The boss spat contemptuously. "Do you think you can do anything without us?"

"I don't know. But," John said with an accession of cheerfulness that was not at all bravado, "I'm going to find out. Anyhow, I'd rather be beaten than be beholden to you, you — Do you know what you are, Sheehan? You're not smart, you're just greedy and there's been nobody to thwart you. You're just a big bully with a soul as fat as your body. Do you know you're getting awfully fat?" He began prodding the other, none too gently, about the ribs and stomach. His fingers found only soft, yielding cushions of fat.

"Don't get fresh, young feller." But Sheehan drew back, nevertheless. John followed him and continued his inspection.

"Why don't you take exercise? I may be prejudiced, but I never saw a fat man yet that was brave. I'll bet a dollar that if you got a good licking you'd whimper like a baby. I'd like to try it. I may do it, too, some of these days. If I'm elected, Sheehan, I'd advise you to buy a passage to Mexico or some place where extradition laws don't hold. You needn't

bother about a round trip ticket, either. I'm probably not showing wisdom in telling you what I'll do if elected, but, as you suggested, I've a lot to learn."

Sheehan tried to sneer, "Don't get —"

"You said that before," John interposed. Then all his disgust for the man before him found expression. "In the meantime, get out!" Sheehan assumed a blustering air. "It's shorter by the window, but you may prefer the door."

He seemed to the other just then a very capable young man. The boss, after a moment's inward debate, chose discretion as the better part of valor.

John went to the window, threw it open, and watched the bulky figure pass out of sight around the corner. He filled his lungs with the cool, clear autumn air.

"That's the first easy breath I've drawn since they came to offer me the nomination. I'm free again. And now I've got to make my bluff good. And," he smiled satirically at himself, "I've heard that work is the only cure for — love-sickness."

He lost no time applying the cure.

The election was a week away. A week is a short time, but in it, if you are a young man not unwilling to lose an occasional night's sleep, a great deal can be accomplished. It would be courting incredulity to record here how many miles John and Lightning traversed during the succeeding seven days, how many men were called upon. He had during the months of his candidacy learned something about "organizations"; he now made this knowledge serve his purpose.

His journeys took him into Plumville and into every ward thereof, and into the townships. In these

latter districts he had less need of the diplomat's tongue to win recruits —" workers " they were called and well called — he found volunteers aplenty, Farmers Cranshawe and Sykes and Criswell and others, sober, unemotional men who were yet willing to follow in a forlorn hope. On the day before election, faith in his fellows quickened, he moved on New Chelsea. When election day dawned, a beautiful, cloudless day — happy omen! — he knew that at every polling-place in the county was one man, at least, working in the interest of John Dunmeade, and that most of them would be loyal.

The Republican state ticket had a narrow escape that autumn; only the two great cities with their machines, their fraud and their supineness saved it. Benton County went Democratic; not entirely, however. The Republicans saved one brand from the burning, although a certain faction of the party was not greatly elated over this partial victory.

State Senator and Boss James Sheehan, election evening, was seen to grin affably as the early returns began to come in from the Plumville wards, showing a comfortable and apparently safe majority for Simcox. He laughed outright when he read the result in the fourth precinct, fourth ward. The word from New Chelsea made the grin shrink perceptibly. And by early moring, when the rural townships had reported, it had disappeared entirely.

About the same hour a young man, pale, stirred to the depths by a victory he had not believed possible, could not understand, was at his window gazing worshipfully up into the sky.

"I have found my place. . . . *My people!* . . . I am willing to pay. . . ."

It was a vow of consecration.

CHAPTER IX

THE CRUSADER

THE court-room in the dingy old court-house was crowded, past the point of mere discomfort. The uncertain May breeze, lazily proffering a bit of relief, was turned back by the screen of those more fortunate spectators who had secured coigns of vantage on the fire-escape outside the open windows. The court-room had filled that morning a full hour before the judge stalked to the bench and the crier began his singsong "Oyez! Oyez!" Many, fearing to lose their places at the price of the noonday meal, had been there throughout the day. Certain gentlemen from Plumville were present, dejected, anxious of mien; many citizens of New Chelsea, quite aware that their town had acquired a new fame but still somewhat dazed by the rapid unfolding of events of which this was the climax; farmers who had deserted their fields, silent, thoughtful, hopeful. Around a table at the end of the jury-box were blase reporters even from the Steel City. Editor Harvey of the *Globe* sat there, clad in his long-tailed Sunday coat, a pile of manuscript before him; *he* had no need to confine his account to telegraphic brevity since he wielded his own blue pencil.

The voice of the defendant's counsel rose and fell. He was something of an actor and he put a deal of

convincing passion into his words; in New Chelsea oratory is still loved. The audience hung intent, almost breathless, on the scene enacted before them. They had the feeling of being not spectators but participants in the little drama. Perhaps they were, for it was the trial of Jim Sheehan.

Senator Murchell was not listening to the speech. He sat immediately behind the defendant in the chair that, thanks to the fat, obsequious tipstaff, had been his during the three days of the trial; this, argued his secret enemies, was evidence of his failing astuteness, since his presence identified him with Sheehan's cause. But the senator was not thinking of this. He was intently regarding the set profile across the counsel-table and measuring the man he saw there against the boyish, eager and very likable young man whom, almost a year before, a little boss and a big had sought to press into their service. John Dunmeade had grown. One saw that in the already grave, almost sad, lines of his face. Work and thought and responsibility and purpose — and something else of which the senator had no inkling — had set their stamp upon him. The senator felt that here was one whose latent strength had been revealed to himself and proven to others. "A capable, forceful man," he thought. One who was beginning to realize the gravity of the task of him who sets out to improve this best of all worlds. To the senator in the arrogance born of the habit of power, it did not occur that the man across the table might represent a new force in the field of activity which he had made his own. He studied the set profile searchingly for some evidence of a hidden lack. Or was there a lack?

There had been no lack of accomplishment during the five months of office-holding. To this truth eloquent witnesses might have been called: Butch Maley and Red Bricker, already serving terms in the penitentiary; Slayton, a fugitive, bail-forfeited; Brown and Parsons, free only pending appeal; and now Sheehan, his fate hanging in the balance. Despite mistakes, despite abuse and temptations, despite the craft of the famous Whittredge, brought at great price from the Steel City, and the frenzied efforts of the Benton County Machine to clog the wheels of justice, John had gone steadily ahead with surprising and growing skill, one step at a time but never swerving from the line of his purpose. Under his feet lay a once very efficient Machine, now shaking with fright, wondering upon whom the next blow of the pursuing Nemesis would fall. The Machine, Senator Murchell knew, would be rebuilt better and stronger than ever, but for the present it was sadly, sadly out of gear.

He let his glance stray from John to the defendant. Sheehan sat slouched in his chair in an attitude that he vainly sought to render jaunty, confident. His cheeks had fallen in slightly, his eyelids were puffy and red-rimmed. His mouth hung flabbily. His hands played nervously with a piece of paper. Out of his eyes looked a sickening fear. He was drinking in thirstily the words of his counsel, a draught to sustain sinking hope; — evidently a coward badly frightened. The contrast was great. Murchell, with an unfamiliar qualm of disgust, returned to his study of the district attorney.

Whittredge brought his brilliant peroration to a

close. The audience sighed audibly. A buzz of low-voiced comment arose.

"Silence!" roared the tipstaff pompously.

The lawyer took his seat beside the counsel-table. His client turned to him with a look of nervous inquiry. Whittredge shook his head.

"A chance — a bare chance, that's all," he whispered. "Confound these rubes!"

The look of fear, almost ludicrous on the big, fat face, deepened. Sheehan turned supplicatingly to Murchell, as though from that resourceful man help might somehow come. Murchell ignored the look. Sheehan sank back in his chair, his defiant attitude broken.

The audience relapsed into an expectant silence, all eyes fixed on the district attorney. For a moment he remained as he had sat throughout the plea for the defense, motionless, leaning a little forward and staring fixedly at the wall behind the judge, as though he saw a vision. Murchell wondered if he had heard a word of Whittredge's speech.

The moment ended. He rose and stood before the jury-box, first addressing the court. He smiled gravely at the jurors. It had taken a whole day's session to select them, but he knew them and that they were well chosen. Then the smile faded from his lips and eyes, replaced by a look to which his neighbors were growing accustomed. He began to speak.

"Gentlemen of the jury, what I have to do is not pleasant. But there is a thing called duty. . . ."

As the first words fell, Murchell's interest leaped; he knew that he was seeing a man mount to a cli-

max in his life. From the beginning the audience was caught in the man's spell, by something that breathed through his voice and that had been absent from Whittredge's perfervid periods. He had a clear, flexible voice and knew how to use it, but it was not his oratory that wove the spell. His speech represented much thought and preparation, yet there was in it nothing theatric, nothing insincere. He spoke simply, without rhetorical flourish, but with a restrained passion to which his hearers, vaguely wondering but unresisting, yielded. They soon ceased to wonder; for he had that gift of the true orator, the ability to make his listeners forget the speaker in what he said.

The speech had been skilfully planned. At first he confined his argument to the jury and the case at bar. Logically he marshaled the evidence against the defendant and analyzed the defense. Then, when he felt that he had brought intellectual conviction to all, he began to direct his words at the audience, not for the telepathic effect on the jury but because he believed a verdict of guilty would be worthless unless it aroused a common horror for the crime. He painted it in livid outline; he made them see it through his eyes. It ceased to be merely technical, assumed a moral significance, became a treachery, a blow against the vital institution of government; it meant political retrogression, anarchy, government not by the social body but by dishonest individual craft.

Never afterward, in a speech, did John reach quite the same heights as on the afternoon when the bright blade of his young indignation cut into the consciences of his hearers. The matter became deeply personal with them. Each man suddenly felt himself ag-

grieved, felt that a shameful attempt had been made to take advantage of his good faith and trust. And then, even while they were condemning Sheehan, John seemed to arraign them. He set them to asking the question, What part have I in this crime? Such offenses are possible only among a people asleep, whose conscience is inactive, who have ceased to care for the honesty of their institutions. They were both aggrieved and aggressors. . . .

. . . Senator Murchell sat to all outward seeming impassive. He listened, as astonished as the rest, but with understanding and — he was himself amazed to mark it — sadly. For he read in the ardent face and words a passion for a hopeless ideal. He felt a genuine pity for the young man whom despite his apostesy he still liked and would have been glad to spare — even, since this revelation of power, to lift into high places — but who had, he believed, with the reckless, impractical chivalry of dreamers of all times, given himself to a forlorn cause. He saw whither John's argument led. He thought he saw, too, what must come afterward when the young dreamer, rapt eyes fixed on an ideal too tenuous, too distant to be realized, encountered the skepticism and unresponsiveness of a practical, workaday world. So much power, he thought, going to waste! For he knew, better than did those who possessed it, the power of moral passion controlled — but always properly controlled! Was there not some way to bind this force to his interest?

John came to the end of his argument. There was no reason to believe Sheehan's crime unique. The nonchalant, matter-of-fact manner in which it had

been committed, the genuine indignation aroused in certain quarters by the prosecution, indicated that it was an established practice of the organization that profited by the crime. And indeed bribery at the polls, falsification of election returns were familiar weapons of Machine politics, so long used that they had ceased to arouse horror and revolt in the careless, calloused hearts of the people. They explained the continuance of the Machine in power. They shed a bright light, too, on the so-called genius of certain political leaders at which men marveled as at some miraculous manifestation of godlike mind — it was not genius, merely crude, primitive dishonesty requiring the direction of no commanding intellect, needing nothing but the will to debauch others' honor.

The senator, grim veteran as he was of a hundred battles with just such "unpractical dreamers," caught himself wincing under the scornful thrusts. Never before had he been told that his power and the means of its attainment were not the splendid badge of unusual strength but the booty of contemptible craft.

"You have been told," cried the young orator, "that this is a case of my ambition seeking a sacrifice. I and my ambition have nothing to do with it. Neither has the defendant, save that his safety and silence mean the safety of those guiltier men whose tool he is. This is a case of the greedy horde that, hungry for our dollars, steals or corruptly buys the power which honest men can not be duped into giving, against those upon whom they prey. It is a case of the organization, parading under the name of a great party, for a purpose whose reach we can not yet measure, against

the people. It is the case —" He paused sharply, to look squarely at Senator Murchell. All eyes followed his. "It is the case of government by individual craft and greed against government by the law that is the expression of the moral sense of the people."

He sat down. The audience stirred uneasily. Murchell smiled grimly.

"Splendid daring!" Whittredge whispered to Murchell. "A magnificent actor."

"That," said Murchell, "is not acting. He means it."

"In our day!" Whittredge raised his eyebrows skeptically. "We've lost — but he risked a good deal by bringing in extraneous matter."

"It isn't extraneous matter," Murchell answered dryly. "He isn't thinking of this case."

"You know him better than I do, of course. I fancy, judging from the surprise depicted on the faces of our bucolic friends, that we've brought out an unexpected Jack Cade in these trials. I fancy you'll find him difficult — for a while. I'm rather sorry for him. I," the famous lawyer smiled, "I was that sort myself once."

The voice of the judge, cold and even, devoid of emotion, as he began to instruct the jury, broke the tension. Critical listeners observed that his charge favored the defendant rather more strongly than the evidence seemed to require. They attributed it to his anxiety not to be biased by the fact that the district attorney was his son; Judge Dunmeade was said to possess an admirably judicial temperament. The jury, importantly led by the fat bailiff, filed out of the court-room. There were no other

cases on the day's list and the judge stalked down from the bench to await the verdict in his chambers. John went to his office. Senator Murchell and Whittredge conducted the drooping Sheehan to the witness-room away from the curious eyes of the crowd. A buzz of excited conversation rose, unrebuked by the tipstaff. Most of the spectators waited to see the end of the drama.

A half hour later the buzz of conversation suddenly ceased. The judge was returning to the bench. Sheehan with Whittredge and Murchell took their seats by the table. They were followed by John. Then the jury filed back into the box. The room became absolutely still; the atmosphere suddenly funereal, painful. Sheehan leaned forward nervously, half raising himself from his chair.

The foreman gave a paper to the bailiff, who handed it to the clerk. He glanced at it eagerly; then his face became very solemn. He passed the indictment on to the judge, who looked at it coldly and returned it. The clerk faced the jurors.

"Gentlemen of the jury, harken to your verdict as the court hath recorded it. You find the defendant guilty as indicted. And so say you all?"

The jurors nodded. Sheehan fell back in his chair with an audible groan. Two big tears coursed ludicrously down his fat cheeks. But nobody laughed. He plucked anxiously at Murchell's sleeve.

"Have I got to go to jail?" he whimpered.

Murchell drew away from the touch. "Not unless our friend Whittredge has forgotten how to delay justice."

At the word Sheehan's face was twisted into an ugly sneer.

"Justice!" he whispered bitterly. His clutch on Murchell's arm tightened. "You got to get me out of this, see?"

Murchell looked at him without answer. Something in the glance made Sheehan cower back sullenly in his chair.

The jury was discharged. Whittredge informed the court that the defense would move for a new trial, bail was renewed, and the court was adjourned. The audience slowly made its way out into the Square, where little knots of noisy, excited men gathered.

Whittredge stepped up to John, holding out his hand. "I congratulate you," he smiled genially. "You took exactly the right tack." John quickly disengaged his hand; he felt that the congratulation was in poor taste.

He saw Sheehan standing forlornly by the table. The big, ponderous figure with the misery shining out of its eyes seemed very pathetic. And, after all, Sheehan was the worst victim of the system. Impulsively John went over to him.

"Sheehan," he said, "I'm sorry. I — I don't like to hurt any one."

The convicted man eyed him in almost childlike reproach. "After all I've done for you!" Whittredge stroked his mustache to conceal a broad smile. Sheehan suddenly seized one of John's hands in both his own. "Johnny, can't you get me out of this — let me off? I'll get out of here — never go into politics again, so help me!"

John's heart gave him a wrench as he shook his head. "I wish I could, Sheehan," he replied honestly. "But you're out of my hands now."

He turned away sadly, no sense of triumph in his victory. He caught up his hat and went slowly out of the court-room, unaware that Murchell was following him.

When he appeared at the door of the court-house some one raised a cheer. It passed along from group to group, until all in the Square had joined in a short, sharp salute. It was not an hysterical demonstration, but unusual for calm, self-contained New Chelsea. It lasted only a few seconds.

John, startled, deeply moved by this the first cheer that he had earned and received — campaign salutes did not count — shrank back from the doorway: to face Murchell. Not until later did John realize the kindly quality of the smile on the older man's face; when he did, he was puzzled by it. He had not expected magnanimity from the big politician whom he had chosen to attack.

"Young man," said the senator, "enjoy this moment. It won't last long. You are at your apex — you are a hero among your neighbors."

John's face reflected the tumult of feeling within him. "Ah! they are good people!" he cried, more to himself than to Murchell. "They pay in advance what I have yet to earn."

Murchell laughed cynically. "You won't earn what you think you will. They won't let you. They are cheering you, not what you said."

"Not me, but what I said. They see a principle."

"You're not the first man who has held that de-

lusion — to his sorrow. But I won't spoil your triumph by croaking — even though," he smiled again, "even though you find me such a crook."

He passed on out into the Square. There was no cheer.

CHAPTER X

CRITICISMS AND WILES

SENATOR MURCHELL paused for an instant on the court-house steps, surveying the garrulous, excited groups scattered over the Square. A faint twinkle came into his eyes as he perceived the hostile glances cast toward him. The twinkle was kindlier than one might have expected. People said that he maintained his legal residence in New Chelsea only because an unwritten law required each end of the state to be represented in the senate, and the vacancy which he had been elected to fill had been from the western district. This was only half a truth. He really liked these men and women among whom his youth had been spent, who looked upon him half familiarly, half in awe, and who, until the late uprising and the advent of John Dunmeade, had followed unquestioningly his political gospel. Most of the time he spent, from the exigencies of his position, in Washington or in the big house in Adelphia; but as he grew older he came to look forward more and more eagerly to the summer months that supported his "legal residence." That his neighbors had turned aside after other gods did not lessen his liking; he tolerantly, somewhat cynically, believed that they would soon return to their old faith.

Another mistake which diagnosticians of the man

often made was in saying that he dissembled when he showed friendliness to his opponents. Politics he kept a rigidly impersonal matter; he was able genuinely to like many men who fought him. Dislikes and hates he had in abundance, but they did not arise from the bare circumstance of opposition. On the other hand, he never confused friendship with policy.

He looked, hesitating, toward the old colonial house across the street. Then he started toward it. Must the habit of a lifetime be broken merely because a son of that house had leveled a lance against him? And, besides, there was a small matter of business to transact. He perceived the figure of an old woman on a bench under the trees, darning industriously, and he smiled, at first in amusement. Then the smile became gentler. After all, there was something pathetic in the sight of an old lady who had given her life to "doing for" a pompous, opinionated old soldier and a stubborn young dreamer.

She looked up as he approached. He held out his hand. "Good afternoon, Miss Roberta."

"Good afternoon, Will Murchell." She continued her darning. "I'll not shake hands," she answered his gesture calmly. "I don't think I'll ever shake hands with you again."

"And why?" The senator always enjoyed their tilts.

"John says you're a dangerous man. John is right."

"I inferred from his speech," he answered with a twinkle, "that he held some such opinion. Were you at the trial?"

"I was not! You may sit down," she commanded,

making room for him," because I want to ask you a question." He obeyed. "What have you been doing to Hugh and our John?"

"You think I've been doing something?"

"Don't evade! Aren't you always at the bottom of some mischief? This house has been like a funeral ever since these trials began. Hugh has been as grumpy as — as a dog with a boil. And John — he doesn't say much, but he feels it. It's this politics! I wish," she concluded vengefully, "a plague'd carry off all you politicians."

"But, Roberta, who'd run the country?"

Miss Roberta sniffed. "I guess the country could run itself better than you politicians do."

"You know something of politicians, then?"

"Don't take that amused tone with me, Will Murchell! I know more than you think. I've watched you. All you politicians are hard and cruel and selfish. I wonder you trust each other!"

"We don't!" he laughed. Then he became thoughtful. "H-m-m! So there's coolness between the judge and John, eh?"

"Don't you know it? I suppose," she discontinued her darning long enough to look at him angrily, "I suppose you're wondering how you can turn it to your advantage. What have you done to them?"

"My dear Roberta," he protested humorously, "I decline to assume responsibility for all the ills in the world. I'm willing to leave something to the Almighty. I suppose they've fallen out over the trials. Naturally! John is just a hot-headed idealist, while the judge is — a practical man."

"A practical man!" she sniffed tartly. "If you'd

been doing for the judge for nearly thirty years, you wouldn't call him that, I guess. Why, he even believes that you're going to put him in the supreme court."

"And you don't?"

"Of course not! I tell him so, but he won't believe me. He's so puffed up with his own importance and selfishness, he won't listen to sense and tries to make his son's life miserable. But I guess," she added, "that's what you mean by 'a practical man.'"

"I am a practical man."

"You are. That's been your trouble all your life. And by that you mean you've let nothing — honor, kindness — stand between you and what you want. Aren't you satisfied yet? Haven't you got all you want?"

"Why, no, Roberta," Murchell answered. "I hope not," he added slowly. "Once a man has all he wants, life is emptied for him."

"Then you've paid for more than you've gotten."

"I didn't know you were a philosopher." He looked his surprise. He paused, then asked abruptly, "Is it because I'm a politician you've always disliked me, Roberta?"

She looked at him suspiciously. Then, seeing that he was in earnest, she answered, "Because I found you out long ago. You've never given the good man Murchell a chance."

"I'm glad you think there is a good man Murchell."

"There was such a man. He starved to death."

"Roberta," he smiled wryly, "your powers of divination are truly marvelous."

He stared reflectively out over the sleepy, quaint old Square, with its trees and flag-pole and out-of-date cannon and shabby court-house: peaceful scene of the late battle. The battle, he knew as others did not know, had been but an opening skirmish in the greater campaign that was in many quarters being prepared against him. . . . It suddenly struck him as a jest — a grim, mirthless jest — that he, an old man, should still be fighting for his power. It did not strike him as humorous that he, the great politician, the powerful senator, should be sitting there under the chestnut tree, taking a scolding from an old woman whom the tide of life had tossed aside to wither on the beach of this tiny, obscure cove. . . .

"Roberta," he said abruptly, "try to keep John out of politics."

"Because he is fighting you?"

"That," he said sententiously, "might be a sufficient reason. But I'm not thinking of that. It isn't the game for a man of his sort."

"You didn't think of that when you believed you could use him."

She sighed. "I wish I could keep him out. But we Dunmeades are set in our opinions. He'll go on fighting, now he's started, until he breaks himself against your hardness or becomes — like you."

"I guess you're right. You Dunmeades have always been a good fighting breed. But don't you think," he queried mildly, "you could have a little charity for a harassed old man fighting for his life?"

"Old man!" She dismissed with another sniff this appeal to sympathy. "Old man, what are you going to do to John?"

"A more pertinent question," he grunted, "just now is, what is John going to do to me?"

He got up abruptly and went into the house. In the library he found Judge Dunmeade before his desk, scratching away at an opinion. With that heavy dignity which he imparted even to the smallest actions of life the judge waved Murchell to a seat. Most people, in the presence of this dignity, immediately became conscious of their inferiority. It did not so affect the present guest. The judge's pen was carefully wiped and laid down.

"Well, Judge?"

"Well, Senator?"

"That son of yours gave us something of a surprise to-day."

"He is a good trial lawyer," the judge answered colorlessly.

"Looks as though Shechan would have to go over the road. Unless," Murchell added inquiringly, "there's a chance to win on appeal?"

"No. John tried his case carefully. There were no errors."

"At least, that the defense can take advantage of," Murchell completed the sentence. The point, however, was lost on the judge. "Whittredge agrees with us on this. Er — about what ought to be the sentence, do you think?"

It would not be correct to say that the judge assumed a judicial air; that, consciously, he always wore. It merely became heavier.

"It is a matter for some thought." He paused contemplatively. "What should you suggest?"

Murchell made a slight motion with his hand to

indicate that any suggestion from him was a negligible matter. And answered, "Would four months be too much?"

"H-m-m! One must remember, of course, that four months for Sheehan would be a heavier sentence than a year for another." The judge cleared his throat. "I'll take it under consideration."

"Yes, some men like the penitentiary better than others do," Murchell agreed soberly. "But think it over — think it over, Hugh. I suspect Sheehan will chafe against being lodged at the public expense. Too bad, I suppose John would suggest, we can't devise some penalty that would break the monotony of his existence," he smiled.

"I should imagine, however, he would almost prefer working for a living in this case." The judicial smile was impressive.

"O, Sheehan has always worked hard. All politicians do. The same time and effort spent in some other lines would be more profitable. The emoluments of politics are a little money — sometimes; a few fair-weather friends and many enemies, some unpleasant notoriety, a modicum of uncertain power — and in the end — very few politicians die in power, Hugh."

The judge smiled skeptically. "A strange saying on your lips, William!"

The senator made no immediate answer. A queer smile softening the lines of his mouth, he sat staring at the portrait of Thomas Dunmeade. "John," he said at last, "made a good speech, eh, Judge?"

"The elocution was good," was the carefully considered answer.

"Don't seem very proud of your son."

"I am not. To think that a Dunmeade should voice such rabid radicalism, such wild sentimentalities!"

"No one will blame you for inspiring it."

"I should hope not!" the judge exclaimed virtuously. "After more than sixty years of respectable, conservative living."

There was a trace of anxiety in his next words. "John's course will not affect the matter we discussed last winter, will it?"

"You mean the justiceship? Afraid the scriptural order will be reversed and the sins of the sons visited on the heads of the fathers, eh? Have you considered that I may not be able to land that? My — influence — in the organization is a little uncertain just at present. These trials haven't helped, either."

"I have that also against my son," the judge said angrily. "He has made it more difficult for his father to realize a lifelong ambition. Besides," he added, "attacking my best friend."

"Yes," Murchell assented. "Don't forget that. Didn't tell John of your ambition, did you?"

"Not that it has been definitely discussed. But he knows that I have always looked forward to ending my work on the supreme bench of the state. But it would have made no difference," he said bitterly. "He has no filial affection, it seems, no sense of gratitude for the advantages I have given him. He is too selfish and set in his opinions to consider his father's interest. He doesn't get it from me. He is," the judge concluded, "his mother's son."

The senator did not smile. "His mother's son!"

He was not a sentimental man. He did not read novels or poetry and he did not believe that love could reach from young manhood to age, especially when the loved one had been long dead. Reasoning from his own experience, he was correct. He did not "love the memory" of Anne Dunmeade nor indulge in sweetly sad retrospection. He thought of her now merely as marking one stage of his development. He remembered her as a gentle yet high-spirited thing full of ardent enthusiasms and with an unshakable belief — it struck him now as almost pathetic — in the goodness of her fellows and the ultimate triumph of "the right." There must have been, he thought, unsuspected possibilities — possibilities that had not been realized — in him, since he could love this woman. He was far from ready to admit that their realization would have been profitable.

He looked again at the portrait of the founder of New Chelsea, whose hard, arrogant face the forgotten artist had not tried to soften. Then he looked at the likeness of Robert; one had to look more closely here to discern in the smooth, priestlike countenance the crafty insincerity that could embrace and profit by a great moral propaganda — when triumph was in sight. Then he turned to the present head of the house of Dunmeade, the cold presentment of complacent respectability.

"His mother's son! I guess that explains him." He rose. "About that justiceship — I'll see what can be done. But I promise nothing definitely so far ahead. You understand that?"

"Certainly," the judge assented. "But I expect

you to do your best. I feel," he added with dignity, "that my services to my country and to my party warrant my expectation. And I ought to draw the old soldier vote to the ticket."

"And, Judge," Murchell concluded, "think over the Sheehan sentence — think it over." He went out of the room.

He was decidedly relieved to find Miss Roberta gone from her bench under the chestnut tree.

On the next Saturday morning James Sheehan, found guilty of conspiracy to falsify election returns, was summoned to bar and sentenced to four months' "hard labor" in the county workhouse. But before the appeal which he took had been refused by the higher court, he had left Benton County for parts unknown.

CHAPTER XI

THE PICKET

JOHN sought refuge in the cubbyhole that Benton County provides for its district attorneys. With a sense of relief he filed away his notes on the Sheehan case in a cabinet marked "Finished Business." Then he threw himself into a chair and began to take stock. . . .

Sheehan's eyes haunted him. John was a normal young man and he was capable of knowing the joy of a task well done. But not this sort of task! He could find no elation in a triumph won at the cost of direct personal misery to others. There was Slayton, for example: a handsome, pleasant young man who looked the criminal not at all. He had not had the courage to stand trial and he had broken bail and fled, leaving behind a sick wife. She and the child born since the father's flight now lay together in a grave. Slayton had not dared to return; perhaps he did not even know of the double tragedy. In his dreams John often saw Slayton's hunted face as it must now appear. Thus early in his career John was learning the lesson that he who sets out to reform the world must keep his heart stern within him. But he was glad to believe that the next stage would be less sanguinary.

The next stage! During the trials — a time too full

of action for investigation of the future — they had seemed the beginning and the end of his task. Now the task was done. So many rascals were suffering or soon would be sent into imprisonment. A machine — no, one comparatively unimportant part of a machine — was badly shaken. What then? Of what use this punishment and destruction unless some one provided something better in its stead? Some one—!

He became conscious that his head was aching, that he was tired all over, every nerve in his body throbbing. For more than six months, ever since his election, he had been working incessantly, feverishly toward this day. The release from strain allowed his maltreated, protesting body to be heard. He got up and left the office, as though fleeing from the problem.

He laid a roundabout course away from Main Street, out into the country. He tramped determinedly along the pike, filling his lungs with the tonic air. It had been a good "growing season." His way took him between fields of clean young corn and barley and oats and occasional cool, green woodlots. The face of the land was instinct with life — riotous, superabundant, thrilling life. He shut the gates of his mind on all serious questions and let himself bathe in the beauty around him. . . .

A farmer, driving a pair of heavy farm horses doing duty at the tongue of a squeaky spring-wagon, rattled up behind him.

"Howdy, Johnny! Want a lift?"

"Howdy, 'Ri! No, thank you. Just taking a little exercise and soaking in all this."

Cranshawe reined in his team. John stopped.

"The country? 'Tis kind o' purty, ain't it, come to think of it! Though I guess, if ye had to grub away in it, year in an' year out, fer a livin', ye wouldn't see it so quick. When I'm huntin' excitement, I go to see some young feller kickin' up his heels at the machine. Little mite too smart fer 'em to-day, weren't ye?"

"They had been so bold, they made it easier."

Cranshawe nodded. "Be smarter next time, I reckon —'f we give 'em a chanct. 'F we give 'em a chanct," he repeated reflectively. "Us farmers, we're feelin' purty good about these trials. Feel like we didn't make any mistake last fall. I've b'en talkin' to a good many of 'em lately. We b'lieve we got somebody to tie to. We ain't had anybody like that hereabouts since the war." Cranshawe smiled kindly down on John.

"Murchell says they'll forget," John smiled back.

"Be'n at ye a'ready, has he?" Cranshawe asked shrewdly. "He'll be at ye harder, before ye're through. Ye got 'em scared. Mebby we'll fergit an' then mebby we won't. But I guess that's our lookout, not yours. So fur's ye're concerned, all ye got to do is go ahead an' try to finish up the job ye've started. 'F we don't do our part, I guess we won't have nobody to blame but ourselves."

"The question is, am I big enough for the job?"

"No, that ain't the question," Cranshawe contradicted quickly. "Because that can't be answered, till ye've tried. The question is, are ye goin' to be scared out by a job because it's big, or are ye goin' to keep up what ye've started? 'F ye don't, there ain't any-

body else to do it. An' we'll soon be back where we started."

John did not reply. He looked thoughtfully over the oat-field beside them, which was waving and tossing in the breeze like a green lake ruffled by the storm. Cranshawe looked at the troubled face, shrewdly estimating what lay behind it.

"That's the way things was meant to be, I expect — every feller 'tend to his own part an' do the thing that comes next. 'F he does the best he can, I guess we can't ask any more."

John nodded slowly. Cranshawe did not pursue the point.

"I see Steve Hampden's back," he remarked casually. "That girl o' his was at the trial. Came in late an' had to stand by the door where I was standin'. She was with some young city feller. Seen her at the rally last fall, too. She seems," he grinned quizzically, "to take consider'ble intrust in ye."

John became aware of a slight disturbance in the cardiac region, but with an effort he achieved an answering grin. "It isn't to be taken very seriously, though."

"I expect not," 'Ri agreed, still grinning. "Well, since I can't spell ye, I'll be movin'. Comin' out hayin' time? We'll give ye plenty of exercise, if that's what ye're needin'. So long!" He clucked to the horses and the wagon resumed its leisurely, squeaking journey. He clucked again and the team broke into a heavy trot. Soon he was out of sight around a turn in the road.

John swung rapidly along for an hour, until the

sweat oozed from every pore of his body. Then he threw himself under a tree by the roadside. The breeze, filtered clean through fifty leagues of cedar and pine, fanned his hot, damp face and filled his lungs. Already his nerves, steadied and rested by play of muscle, were resuming their wonted healthy tone.

He pondered his problem. Yet he knew that it was answered, not by 'Ri Cranshawe's homely wisdom, but by the inscrutable purpose of the Force which had impelled him into the fight. He could not withdraw from the task to which he had been set. Whither? was a question that he needed not to answer, so long as a straight piece of road lay ahead. . . . There was less of the crusader's fire than when, in the October moonlight, he had taken his first resolve. He knew more of the complexity of the task, of the strength required of him who would perform it, of the insidious, far-reaching power exercised by Murchell. Being young, his knowledge still incomplete, he thought in terms of persons, not of systems. He thought sadly of his father's displeasure. . . . And he thought of Katherine, whom, it appeared, the winter had not taught to forget him. He had not learned to forget. Work could dull, it could not wholly stifle, the longing for her. And yet he had not been unhappy. . . . He knew that he could not say no to that which was calling him into service.

He walked home through the calm of sundown. Once he halted, listening intently. The leaves on the trees hung motionless, but from the earth came a faint, indistinct murmur — the voice of the growing things. While the petty creature man scrambled and

battled for what she brought forth, Nature worked on serene, immutable, producing — the eternal Force. He thrilled, as though he heard a prophecy.

This time he did not avoid Main Street. At the corner where stands the Farmers' Bank he met Warren Blake and a companion. Warren stopped him to introduce the stranger, Haig, a lanky, cadaverous individual who, as the introduction developed, was the author of a much criticized novel, *The Brethren.*

John acknowledged his hearty greeting. "I have read your book, Mr. Haig — with interest," he said politely but cautiously.

Haig grinned genially. "Great Scott! You don't think I expect you to say you like it, do you? Nobody likes it. What would be the use of writing a novel, if people liked it?"

"I don't know, I'm sure — so long as people buy it," John ventured, liking the man.

"Precisely!" Haig drawled. "I heard you twisting Murchell's tail this afternoon. If you don't mind, I'd like to congratulate you — on your nerve. I've been wondering whether you are merely a brave man or a specimen of that splendid genus, the fool. Brother Blake inclines to the latter notion."

"Yes, Warren would," John smiled.

"I do," said Warren solemnly. "I don't believe in agitation. It hurts business — and the agitator."

"Warren," John laughed, "will undoubtedly become a pillar of the state — he has no sense of humor."

"No, I'm not a joker," Warren answered. "And you'll find it no joke to attack the Republican party as you did to-day. You might as well turn Democrat."

"Or a mugwump? Which is even worse. In New Chelsea, Mr. Haig, we daily offer thanks for prosperity, good weather and the Republican party. We're a religious community. Our only doubt is whether Providence is Republican or the Republican party Providence."

"You oughtn't to be irreverent," Warren reproved. "They voted for you."

"I'm in some doubt," John mused, "at what my irreverence is supposed to be aimed."

"Neither the works of Providence nor the Republican party is matter for levity, I suppose." Haig's ready grin broadened, as he placed a hand on Warren's shoulder. "Here, Mr. Dunmeade, but for the grace of God, stand I. My people wanted to make me a banker." Warren merely blinked good-naturedly at the familiarity.

"A dollar, Mr. Haig," John put in, "held close enough to the eye, will hide the rest of creation."

Haig chuckled. "Now that's good. That's very good. Wish I could have thought of it. Do you subscribe, Brother Blake?"

"I do," said Warren unexpectedly. "What do you do with your royalties?"

The chuckle became a roar. "Do you get that, Mr. Dunmeade? Right where I live!"

"Good for New Chelsea's pride!" John laughed. "As we put it in New Chelsea, are you leaving soon, Mr. Haig?"

"Lord! no. I'm here for my health. Doctor told me I'd been working too hard or not hard enough — I forget which — and that I needed fresh air for my

liver. So I trailed up here after the Hampdens — where, by the way, Brother Blake and I are dining this evening."

"Yes, and we'd better start," Warren suggested patiently.

"Ah! these fiery lovers! Come around and see me, Mr. Dunmeade. That damn doctor has interdicted tobacco, but I've brought along a brand I can recommend."

John promised to come around, and they parted.

He reached home to be soundly scolded by Miss Roberta for his tardiness at supper. None the less faithfully, however, did she minister to the needs of his physical man, when he had returned from his tubbing, clad in fresh, cool-looking flannels. Miss Roberta, who would not have admitted it to him, took a secret pride in his attractiveness; she probably exaggerated it.

After supper he strolled into the library. He was feeling rather at a loss in his idleness; not for months had he had an evening free from work. And he was a bit lonesome; he could not help thinking of the two young men dining at the Hampdens. The judge was reading by the desk, the light from the lamp throwing his cold, heavy features into sharp relief. He looked up inhospitably, as John entered.

"Busy, Judge?" John generally called him "Judge," feeling not without reason that his father took more pride in his office than in his paternity. Of late he had had especial reason for this belief.

"Not too busy — if you have anything of importance to discuss."

"O, no. Just dropped in for a little gossip. I won't disturb you." John turned to leave the room, but his departure was arrested by the judge's reply.

"I suppose you expect me to pat you on the back because you've sent another man on the road to prison?" One might have called his expression a sneer, had the word been compatible with the judicial dignity.

"Is this a congratulation, Judge?"

"It is not. I do not regard your course as matter for congratulation."

"I have felt that you weren't in full sympathy with it."

"I am not." The judge laid his book on the desk and sat stiffly erect. John was immediately enabled to sympathize with those unfortunates who were arraigned before his father. "Now that the case is ended, I may speak frankly. As a judge I, of course, approve of the punishment of crime. But I don't approve your going out of your way to attack Senator Murchell, a fine, clean-living gentleman who has always showed the warmest friendship for your family." Judge Dunmeade spoke with restrained emphasis.

"And has created a pernicious machine," John added incautiously.

"Which elected you to the office you now hold."

"Your memory isn't good, Judge. The machine nominated me. The people of Benton County elected me, you may remember."

"You couldn't have been nominated without Murchell's endorsement."

"That, I'm sorry to say, is probably true," John said, wishing that he had not ventured into the room.

"You admit it? You show a strange sense of gratitude for favors received! I have been deeply hurt by your recent attitude. I can understand a Dunmeade being ambitious and trying to attain his ambition by regular, faithful service to his party. I can't understand one of us seeking notoriety through the sensational methods of the political agitator."

John flushed resentfully. Then the resentment died down. Already he had learned enough to know that this, the climax of six months' coldness, was but a bitter foretaste of the bitterer misunderstanding with which a slothful world pays its trail-makers.

"I hope, father," he said, with almost boyish wistfulness, "you don't think that of me. It seems we can't get the same point of view. But I'd like you to believe in my good faith."

A soft answer does not always turn away wrath. "What can you expect? Your methods are those of the unsuccessful — without the excuse of having been repudiated by your party —"

"But I was repudiated by part of it."

"Only after you had publicly disowned it! You have tried to stir up a baseless prejudice against a man who is respected and considered throughout the nation. You have aimed a blow at your party."

"But, after all, I'm an official of Benton County, not of the Republican party," John demurred. "You can see that."

"Of course! But you don't serve the people when you deliberately set out to injure the party that has given this nation a prosperity unprecedented"— the judge's arm swept out in a magnificent gesture — "unparalleled in history."

John turned away to hide a smile, not a very happy smile. "I don't want to injure the party, if by party you mean the great body of men who compose it."

"You injure the party, sir," his father exclaimed hotly, "when you try to create prejudice against the leaders whose genius and character have made it the powerful agency it is. And you will find that both they and the party will outlive your attacks, sir."

"I see no reason to doubt that."

"Then I suppose you will be content, now that Sheehan is convicted?"

John paused thoughtfully. "I have to be honest with you. I am not content," he said slowly. "I shall not be content until I have done my best to destroy boss rule in this state — at least, in this county."

"That's a school-boy sentiment, its implication as ungrounded as school-boy generalities mostly are."

John pointed to a saber hanging over the mantel. "Judge, you were a soldier — a very fine one, I'm told. You risked life and health for a cause. Sentiment, wasn't it, Judge?"

"No, sir! Duty to a principle. A fundamental principle was at stake. It was the duty of all respectable men to defend it."

"It seems to me that a fundamental principle is involved here."

"No such thing!" Judge Dunmeade exclaimed angrily. "No such thing! You can't judge a system by its incidental errors, but by its large results. The strong must always lead, and they will go to the front by the shortest path. The fittest will survive."

"That question, who is fit? has caused a good deal of trouble in the world, hasn't it?" John slowly

walked the length of the room. He did not wish to quarrel with his father, and he realized the futility of argument; they had no common ground on which they could meet, he remembered that they had never had much in common. And the judge's prejudice was not unique. There were many men — good men, too — to whom party loyalty was nothing short of a religion; and for "party" they accepted Sheehan's definition.

He went back to his father. "We don't need to quarrel over it, do we? After all, we're father and son. I — I ask you to remember that it would be easier all round for me to go along with the old order."

But the judge was not to be mollified. "Old order! Think you know more than your old, behind-the-times father, do you? Think one blast of your school-boy eloquence will create a new system, do you? You have a poor way of showing affection. Your attitude is a personal affront to me, a criticism of my honor and intelligence. I am not one of those who consider themselves better than their party. I'm proud to say I belong to the old order — as you call it. Good night!" he concluded shortly.

"I'm sorry you feel so about it. Good night — father."

Judge Dunmeade resumed his book.

Now the judicial temperament is not given to impulse. But, as John went slowly out of the room Judge Dunmeade experienced a novel sensation which in the brief moment allowed for reflection he was at loss to define. Later he decided that it was his generous nature asserting itself to give his son another chance. He may have been mistaken.

Be that as it may, before John had passed quite out of the room he was recalled by an unexpected "Wait!" The tone, it is true, was not precisely propitiatory.

He returned. "Yes, father?"

"I suppose," said the judge gruffly, "your father's interest can have no weight with you. It ought to be clear to you without suggestion from me that if you persist in attacking Senator Murchell you make my lifelong ambition impossible."

"Are you still taking that seriously? The senator has been teasing you along with the promise of a justiceship for ten years. Don't you know by this time that he has no intention of giving it to you?"

"He gave you a nomination."

"Yes, he happened to believe he could make use of me."

"But your old-fashioned father, with nothing but his four years' service in the nation's battles and twenty years on the bench, has no value. Is that it?"

"It isn't a question of merit or talent. If it were that, I should say," John replied gently, his conscience generously keeping silence, "I should say you have the right to ask big things. But it seems to be solely a question of the senator's political necessities. I — I doubt that he needs you, father."

"That means, I presume," the judge said bitterly, "that I count for nothing against your notions? But I might have known it!"

"I have already paid something for the privilege of having 'notions.' I shall probably have to pay more. But we haven't the right to consider one man against a principle —"

But the judge had done all that a generous nature could ask.

"You needn't explain. Your refusal to consider your father speaks for itself. Good night!" he repeated.

And John, smiling helplessly, left the judge. The latter consumed many minutes pondering the pertinence of a certain proverb in which a serpent's tooth and an ungrateful child are compared.

Out in the clear night John walked slowly about. More than ever he realized the price which they must pay who would be Voices. His sense of loneliness deepened: the loneliness of the picket standing guard under the stars.

CHAPTER XII

APPLES OF EDEN

IF the summer before had been gay, what shall we say of that which now opened? The center of gaiety was East Ridge. The Italian villa was the scene of one continuous house party. Certain gilded families from the Steel City, advance guard of the colony that was to come, "camped out" experimentally in hastily remodeled farm-houses pending the erection of the proposed "cottages." Thither arriving summer residents immediately began to cast longing glances; but the Ridge, sad to relate, thought itself sufficient unto itself. A whole volume might be filled with the serio-comic adventures of the family of Bates, tin-plate manufacturer from Castleton — twenty miles south — who bought and moved into a Ridge farm-house in the innocent belief that neighbors were always neighborly; late in the summer he sold his farm at a loss to Hampden.

It was inevitable that John and Katherine should meet. It happened one morning a few days after the Sheehan trial when John was leaving the post-office with his daily mail. A trap drew up in which sat Katherine and a young man. There was no trace of self-consciousness as she cordially greeted John and introduced her companion. John remembered a saying of hers concerning one whom "people were apt

to sneer at as a speculator," but whom she thought "splendid because he had had the brains and courage to make his own fight and win." He had no difficulty in identifying that man with Gregg, of whom he had heard more than once. Gregg was an attractive fellow, a few years older than John, of athletic build and pleasant manner. He looked the pirate of the stock exchange even less than did Hampden; if the dollar madness had gripped his soul it had as yet set no mark on his frank, nicely-browned countenance. He joined Katherine in congratulating John on his recently acquired fame; they insisted on "fame." She laughingly chided him on his failure to run down to the Steel City to see her during the winter.

"But you must make up for it, now we're here. We expect to see you often on the Ridge. There will be tennis. He will make you play," she said to Gregg, who responded pleasantly.

"I'd like to have the chance, Mr. Dunmeade. I've been hearing about your game."

John murmured a promise to put in an appearance in the indefinitely near future and broke away, mopping his brow and wondering at the perverse fate that made people, whose ideals were so far from his, so attractive to him.

But, although Gregg spent nearly every week-end on the Ridge, John did not keep his promise. Indeed, he had little time for recreation; and that little was put in with Haig, with whom he was rapidly cementing a friendship. The June primaries were at hand. John felt less pride than responsibility when he found that he was expected to lead the campaign to capture the county nominations from the machine and that,

by tacit consent of friends and enemies alike, upon him devolved the task of choosing the reform ticket. He gave much thought to this task. It was not simple. There were many unworthy gentlemen, he discovered, willing to be swept into office by the wave of popular protest. And he could have learned here, had he been so minded, that even a reformer must employ the wisdom of the serpent. He achieved results at which a politician might have sneered but that were on the whole very promising in the light of his inexperience.

One day he summoned Jeremy Applegate to his office.

"Jeremy, you're the recorder's chief clerk."

"Yes," answered Jeremy anxiously, wondering what blunder had been unearthed.

"Know how the office ought to run?"

"I guess so."

"Do you think you could run it yourself?"

"I been runnin' it for twenty years, what runnin' it's had. 'Tain't much."

"Jeremy, how would you like to run for the nomination?"

"Me — recorder?" Jeremy stared at John in amazement. His withered old face turned red, then pale. His stooping shoulders became suddenly straight and stiff.

"Yes. How would you like it?"

Jeremy's pride died as suddenly as it had been born. "I — I'm afraid," he muttered.

"But we're going to win."

"I think you're goin' to win. But I — I've seen

'em pull through so often. S'pose you lose. I'd be done for. They'd throw me out."

"Can't you chance it?" John urged. "You'd make a good candidate. You've lots of friends and," he smiled, "you've proved that you're a good vote-getter. You'd be working for a man at last."

"Yes," Jeremy said dully, "I'd be workin' for you."

"No. I meant you'd be working for yourself, Jeremy."

Tears stood in Jeremy's eyes. "Me!" he cried bitterly. "Me — a man! I'm just a poor critter without any backbone. They've beat it out of me with their power and their orders. I'm just man enough to be ashamed but not to fight 'em. I'm afraid of 'em. Sheehan's gone — yes, but Murchell's left. An' if they was both gone, there'd be somebody to take their place. I been takin' their orders too long to b'lieve you can win. They've got me, body an' soul. They get everybody. They'll get you in the end. No, you don't want me — you need a man."

John turned away, with a sickening sensation, from the beaten, hangdog look in Jeremy's eyes, realizing that the generous, impulsive suggestion had been unwise indeed. The old soldier rose and stumped heavily to the door. There he paused.

"But I thank you kindly for thinkin' of me," he said humbly. "I hope you win. And I hope you won't hold it against me, Johnny?"

"No, I shan't hold it against you, Jeremy," John said gently. Jeremy left. As always when he saw the old clerk's pathetic plight, John felt anger, hot, bit-

ter anger, rise against the Thing — the "they" — that crushed the pride and courage out of its servitors, made them cringing, fearing creatures even in the face of possible release from servitude.

In Haig John found an unexpected but invaluable aide. The novelist had once been a political reporter on a Steel City newspaper and he knew the game of politics as John did not know it. He gave much shrewd advice by which John profited. And the reform ticket was nominated. Murchell, cynically willing to let the reform wave run its brief course, withheld his hand. The machine, headless and broken, struggled, but cautiously, its arm palsied by fear and the certitude that defeat was to be its portion. Bereft of its familiar weapon fraud it was easily conquered by a people thoroughly angered. Even Plumville gave the reformers a small majority. Haig hailed John as a little "boss."

John indignantly rejected the title. "My work is done — or, at least, will be when they're elected. I can't interfere with them then."

"Say, aren't you afraid the cows will take you for a bunch of nice, green, succulent clover? Just wait," Haig grinned, "until they're in office. Make no mistake, sonny — you'll need to keep a tight rein on them. About a year from now I expect to see some pretty little, home-made illusions badly busted."

There were others who saw in John a power that could bestow or withhold.

A few days after the primaries John met Jeremy, a patently-worried Jeremy, whose eyes would wander away.

"I'm glad you won, Johnny," he declared. "I

didn't work for you, but I didn't work ag'in' you neither — not very hard."

"I know that, Jeremy."

Jeremy fumbled the button in the lapel of his coat. "A — about my job — I —"

"Yes, Jeremy," John said hurriedly. "You can still have it, if we win in the fall and I have any influence." He walked away to escape the old man's gratitude. He was becoming accustomed to this sort of interview.

And the promised journey to the Ridge had not yet been made.

One afternoon Haig found him in his office. "How's the bosslet? Had a shave to-day? Feeling conversational?" Haig's questions and remarks were usually poured out with the rapidity of a machine gun.

"Get out! I'm busy." John gave the intruder a brief glance and turned his attention again to the paper he was drawing.

"Because," Haig continued, "you and I are going out for a little drive this afternoon."

"We're not. I hope you are. I've got things to do."

"This American habit of industry is becoming a positive mania. I'll write a novel about it. I'm told the critics haven't had any one to roast lately. Are you coming peaceably or will you go anyhow?"

"I'll do neither." John continued his writing.

"All right!" Haig seated himself, deposited his feet on the desk beside John and commenced an apparently interminable monologue on the apocryphal cleverness of a dog he once had owned.

"You're an infernal nuisance sometimes, Haig!"

"Coming along? No? All right! As I was saying, when Moses had learned to carry a stick I taught him to play the drum, and after that to use a knife and fork was easy. You ought to have seen—"

John threw down his pen in disgust. "I surrender," he groaned. "I'll go to get rid of you."

"Thought I could persuade you. Come right along. I've got a buggy outside."

John put his papers away and meekly followed to the waiting vehicle. Haig drove, chattering volubly of whatever came into his mind. John leaned back lazily, an audience of whom nothing was expected but occasional assent. This was not the first excursion of the kind into which Haig had seduced him; its predecessors had all been enjoyable.

But when Haig turned into the Ridge road, John stirred uneasily. When, at the crest of the Ridge they turned toward the north, his anxiety found words.

"Going anywhere in particular?"

"Anywhere you'd like to go?"

"No-o, I guess not."

"Then we'll go to the Hampdens. There's always somebody there."

"O, no, we won't. Let's go back the other direction. I like the south road better."

"The devil you do! Why not Hampdens?"

"Well, you see," John began to explain lamely, "Hampden and I aren't on very good terms and—"

"Lord! Don't I know that? He spends most of his time enumerating the different kinds of damn fool you are. I sometimes think his list is incomplete.

But what difference does that make? We aren't going to see him. There's a fellow up there — Gregg — that I want you to play tennis with."

"I haven't had a racket in my hand all summer," John protested.

"*Macht's nichts aus!* I've never seen you play, but you can beat him. You've got to. He's got my scalp so often, I have to take revenge by proxy. Besides, you need a little frivolity. You're beginning to take yourself seriously, and that's a bad sign. And I've been feeling selfish all summer, having no one to share her with — her air of being a perfect lady and her silly little affectations —"

"No one," John interrupted coldly, "could accuse Katherine Hampden of affectation."

"Eh? O, these youngsters!" Haig groaned,— he might have been two or three years older than John,— "who can't hear the rustle of a skirt without at once suffering love pangs and can't understand that a sensible, experienced man gets more fun out of the safe old uns! I don't mean her. I mean the mother. Isn't she a pippin? The picture of sleek health — with her constant look of a dying calf. I fooled her the other day," he chuckled. "She thought she was going to faint. At least, she said she was. She clutched at me. I dodged. She sat plump down on the grass. I helped her up and she walked away, the maddest old hen in Benton County."

"I must say you've a pleasant way of appreciating hospitality!" John protested indignantly. "Let's not go there — not this afternoon, anyway."

"Why not? Don't work that Hampden excuse again now."

"Well, I'm not fixed up for it." He looked at his shoes upon which a thin coating of dust had settled.

Haig surveyed him and then stretched out over the dashboard a lean shank, the trouser of which had not felt an iron for many a day. "You're a regular dude beside me."

"Yes," John grinned, "but then I'm not posing as an eccentric."

"O, these witty rubes!" Haig broke into a gale of shrill laughter that caused even their staid livery horse to prick up his ears. "Why don't you want to go? Hm-m-m! I scent mystery here — perhaps some unsuspected romance. Is it possible that you and —"

"O, have it your own way," John agreed with as good grace as possible. "No wonder you could write that fool book!" He could not well explain that he and Katherine had been in love, that he was still in the same case though she had probably recovered, that he had persistently stayed away from her for the sake of his peace of mind, and — Almost any excuse for yielding will serve, when one is resisting a weakness to which one both wishes and does not wish to succumb.

On the shaded eastern terrace they found a small group of young people of both sexes. Haig saluted them with a triumphant hail, "I've brought him! Now, you broker man, I'll bet you ten dollars he can beat you, best two out of three sets."

Katherine rose and came forward to meet them. Gregg accompanied her, almost with the air of a host, it seemed to John. They greeted the new-comers cordially, Katherine with such a notable absence of con-

straint that John, who had nerved himself for an ordeal, was rather heavily let down. He could almost have believed that she had forgotten the ride home under the October moon.

When the greetings were over, "Now, Gregg," Haig began, "how about that bet?"

"Of course, Mr. Dunmeade," Gregg said courteously, "I shan't bet on your performance without your consent. But I'll be glad of a match. I can rig you out."

"Very well," John agreed helplessly. "And," he muttered vengefully to Haig, "I hope you lose your bet." Haig merely grinned. John followed Katherine to be introduced to the rest of the group.

Yet, once a member of the group, his reluctance passed away, not suddenly but slowly, driven out by a sense of exhilaration that gradually stole in on him: much the sort of exhilaration, one must suppose, felt by the tight-rope artist or by him who treads the edge of a precipice. The proximity of danger challenged him; yet he told himself there was no danger. Katherine had evidently decided to ignore as a negligible episode, if she had not forgotten, the last summer. Doubtless her brief interest had been a temporary aberration induced by the moonlight. And, since he must pay in equal coin in any case, why not have something for which to pay? *Et cetera!* Love always has its sophistries, which convince without deceiving.

And it was undeniably pleasant to loll luxuriously in the comfortable wicker chair, watching the play of animated young faces from whose freshness neither work nor worry had subtracted, against the

background of greensward and flowering shrubbery; listening to the tinkle of ice in glasses and the hum of well-bred voices in small talk, not very witty nor wise perhaps, but relaxing, soothing; breathing in the heavy fragrance of honeysuckle and hyacinth with which the aroma from his very good cigarette mingled deliciously. Occasionally he tossed a light word on the eddy of conversation. He noticed that when he spoke, all, especially the men, showed interest. That, too, was pleasant.

"I don't greatly want, I certainly don't need, but I can enjoy this sort of thing," he thought. "A little of it, that is. And I can understand that one brought up in it might think it indispensable." This was not so pleasant.

Later, Gregg reminded him of the promised match and, when they had donned flannels, it was played. John lost, although after the first set he gave his opponent a hard game. Gregg proved a generous conqueror, finding more excuses for his victory than John could have devised. The latter enjoyed every point, especially when Haig, grumbling something about a "thrown match," paid his bet. Afterward, in the physical contentment consequent upon hard exercise and a good tubbing, he stayed to dinner, a very gay, informal affair served on the terrace by candlelight. He sat between pretty Mrs. Gilbert, who he understood had a husband somewhere, and little Miss Haines, who adored Persian cats and was very much interested in his account of a "smoke" that Miss Roberta possessed. Then more luxurious lolling and smoking into the gathering night. After

which there was music, furnished principally by Mrs. Gilbert, who sang really well, and by Haig, who had a fair tenor voice. John was almost regretful when the time came to leave.

Late that night, going over the day, he found that he had talked a great deal with Katherine, but never alone. If she had manœuvered, she had accomplished it so cleverly that he could not perceive the intention. Just once had he excuse to believe that she still thought of the last summer. He was leaving.

"I am very glad you came," she said brightly. "You will come again?"

"And I am glad. I certainly shall."

Then it was he thought he caught a question flickering momentarily in her eyes. But the question, if there at all save in his imagination, was gone before he could make sure.

"Good night!"

He was silent during the drive homeward, and Haig, busily humming the pilgrims' chorus *motif,* did not try to interrupt his thoughts. They were nearing the town when Haig abruptly broke the silence.

"It's a shame, isn't it?" he said musingly. "Nature evidently intended her for a mother. With that superb body and health she ought to bring a dozen or so equally superb children into the world and give her life to bringing 'em up."

"Haig," John said shortly, "you have a most disgusting fashion of discussing women."

"Now, Polly Ann dear!" the novelist jeered, "don't fly off the handle. Where's the harm in discussing an event that is repeated oftener than any other in

all nature? — But she won't. She'll probably marry that Gregg, shirk her manifest destiny and devote her life to turning herself into a selfish pig.

"Unless," he chuckled, "you take the field for her salvation and the honor of New Chelsea. There's your chance. Go it, my son!"

John's laugh may have convinced himself. "Suppose I were fool enough to try, I'd have a lot to offer against the apparently irresistible Gregg, wouldn't I?"

"Well, now," Haig repeated the chuckle, "I hadn't thought of that. You'd have nothing. I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll go to my rooms and throw cold hands, quarter a throw, until I've won back that ten dollars you lost me."

"And I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll drive right home and go to bed. I'm too sleepy to endure more of your clatter to-night."

Haig's parting shot as they separated was, "Now I've shown you the way, go up there often. You'll be a brighter and nobler man for it."

John went, not often and always in Haig's company, it is true, but often enough to keep burning brightly the fires within him.

If John's love affairs remained *in statu quo*, those of another advanced, at least to a climax. Amid the cares of bank and divers trusteeships Warren Blake found time to contribute to the gaiety of the Ridge. That is to say, he was frequently to be found on the Hampden terrace, an inconspicuous, often half-forgotten listener to the nimble gossip and badinage. Had he been more obtrusive, it is probable that he would have been snubbed into staying away; but

one does not greatly resent the attentions of a shadow.

Sometimes Katherine let him ride with her, finding his infrequent, prosaic utterances almost a comfort. She did not admit to herself that she needed comfort, but there were times when the monotony of familiar faces and the unvarying chatter chafed and she had a need to get away into the hills alone. To be with Warren was to be practically alone. They were on such an excursion late one afternoon. Apparently the reflections in which she had lost herself did not concern him, for she did not hear a question that he addressed to her.

"I beg your pardon, Warren. I wasn't listening —"

He repeated the question. "Will you marry me?"

She gasped in astonishment. "Why, Warren, I — I have never considered —"

"I thought you wouldn't." His tone, almost devoid of feeling, misled her into a smile.

"Why did you ask, then?"

"I owed it to myself to try."

"I don't think you care very much, Warren." It was difficult to take this proposal seriously.

"Yes, I do," he answered quietly. Then she saw his eyes and knew that she was in the presence of a real suffering. Instantly she became gentle.

"I am sorry — I didn't think —"

"You needn't be sorry over something you can't control," he interrupted. "One loves or one doesn't. We don't have much to do with it."

"At least," she said gently, "one can suppress an unhappy love. I hope —"

"You know better than that."

She knew better than that! . . . Somehow his quiet words sent the blood rushing to her cheeks.

"Why don't you marry John Dunmeade?" he asked abruptly.

She turned on him angrily. "Warren! That is an —"

"An impertinence?" he interrupted again, evenly. "You will allow me this time. I'm not likely to bother you much again.— You were in love with him last summer. And you aren't the sort that forgets. Nor is he, I think. He will go further than any of us — he'll go better. He is what you need. With me — with Gregg — you would be merely a pleasant incident. You know that yourself. I think you're fighting against that knowledge. Don't do it." It was the longest speech she had ever heard from his lips.

"I think," she said with more bitterness than she realized, "women are always just a pleasant incident in the lives of men. That is truer of John Dunmeade than of any man I know."

Characteristically, he made no reply; he had said what he had to say. For more than a mile they rode without speaking. She was struggling to regain the wonted outward serenity he had so unexpectedly disturbed, and to silence the questions her heart persisted in asking. It was not a new struggle for her. All summer she had been engaged in it, in the effort to hold firmly to a resolution she had made.

When they were nearing home she turned to him again. "I didn't know you and he were friends."

"We are not," he replied simply. "He doesn't care for me."

"You are mistaken about him and me," she said steadily. "But that you could plead for him, when you — O, I call that fine, Warren!" she ended impulsively.

"I'm thinking of you," he said. "Since I can't have what I want, I want you to have what you need."

When they reached the house, he helped her to alight and would have left with merely a formal "Good afternoon." But she held out her hand. "I — I have done you an injustice," she said kindly. "We all have. I think you are a very fine gentleman. I can't give you — what you want. But I can give a sincere respect — and the hope that you will find happiness."

He smiled faintly and rode away, leaving her with the sense of having done an unintended cruelty.

She waited until the groom came to take her horse and then walked slowly to a shaded seat in a secluded corner of the garden. For more than an hour she sat, chin cupped in one hand, gazing out over the green hills. Once, "It's such a jumble," she sighed, "— what I want. I wish I weren't so — I wish he —" She did not indicate what she wished, and she was not referring to Warren Blake.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PRIME MINISTER

SENATOR MURCHELL, after several weeks' absence, had returned to his "legal residence." On his roundabout journey homeward he had been interviewed by many reporters concerning a rumored revolt in the organization. His answers, they had noticed, were marked by an irritable quality strange indeed, coming from the man who "played politics twenty-four hours of every day."

A few days after the senator's return, New Chelsea was visited by a monarch. But he came incognito, with a notable absence of regal splendor. To Silas Hicks, at the station, appeared a short, square-whiskered, alert man who asked to be taken to Senator Murchell's home.

"Senator's out to the farm," Silas responded in the omniscience of hackmen.

"Then take me to the farm."

Arrived at the farm, he received another command — to wait. A hired man was repairing a broken place in the fence. From him royalty demanded to know the whereabouts of the prime minister.

The hired man leisurely drove a nail before answering; he recognized no power higher than the premiership and was accustomed to the arrival of gentlemen in a hurry. "'Low ye'll find the senator,"

he drawled, pointing with his thumb, "in the potato patch back of the barn."

Before the words were out of his mouth, the visitor had started, with quick, decided steps, in the direction indicated.

"Seems to be some in a hurry," the hired man commented.

Silas sighed. "Guess I can't charge him more'n two dollars fer the trip." Silas had this in common with his passenger: his motto was, "Charge all the traffic can bear."

In the middle of the potato patch the visitor beheld the figure of his minister, arrayed in a pair of the hired man's overalls and a straw hat of enormous brim, busily hoeing. Toward this truly rural figure Sackett — for our monarch is no other than the president of the great Atlantic Railroad — made his way, considerably to the damage of the vines beneath his feet.

"Careful!" admonished the senator. "Walk between the hills."

Sackett became more careful. "How are you, Senator?"

"How're you, Sackett?"

Their hands met, to part instantly.

"I was in Plumville and thought I'd drop over to see you."

"Yes?" One might have perceived in the senator's tone a lack of that eager interest to receive which is a royal prerogative.

"Raising quite a crop, aren't you — of farmer votes? Didn't Lincoln say something about the man who raises two votes where one grew before?"

To which facetious remark the senator vouchsafed no answer but a grunt. Sackett looked out over the young corn in the neighboring field.

"Sorry you missed me in Adelphia. I was in New York."

"Didn't miss you," Murchell grunted again. "I didn't look for you."

There was a pause during which he resumed his hoeing.

"What," Sackett demanded, "is the matter with Sherrod?"

The senator's hoe hovered over a crawling bug. "Nothing more'n usual," he answered. "Seems to be a good many bugs this year. I must get some bug-killer." The descending hoe cut the bug into two squirming pieces. Sackett looked up inquiringly; he wondered if the senator were speaking in parables.

"Can't we get out of this sun?" He mopped his red face.

Murchell dropped the hoe and led the way to a lone walnut tree at the corner of the patch and they sat down.

"About Sherrod," Sackett began, "why can't you patch up things with him?"

"He wants too much," Murchell answered briefly.

"I was talking to him last week."

Murchell turned on him suddenly. "Told you I ought to get down from the head of the organization, didn't he? Told you that Adelphia and the Steel City are turning against me, that he wants to be governor and that the steel people want Parrott for my job in the senate, didn't he?"

Sackett was astonished at this apparent omniscience.

"Did you deal with him, Sackett?"

"No."

"But you sent him away in a good humor, eh? Like to be friends with both sides, don't you?"

"You fellows," Sackett exploded irritably, "had better settle your squabbles, or you'll give some incendiary the chance to step in and raise Cain. The trouble is, Sherrod is close to the Steel City organization — and the Michigan is trying to get into the city." The secret of the royal irritation is out; a competing monarch is making ready to invade his dominion!

Murchell smiled bitterly. "So that's it? For twenty years I've been doing your dirty work. And now at the first threat of competition you're ready to throw me over without a scruple — if you think it's safe! It isn't safe, Sackett. Lord! what cowards you rich men are! You're rotten — rotten as last year's apples."

Sackett's eyes snapped angrily. "I've my duty to my stock-holders — of whom you are one. Can you keep the Michigan out?"

"I don't know, so I won't promise. But have I ever failed you yet?"

"How are you going to do it?"

"I don't know yet. I'll let you know later how much it'll cost you. This reform crowd in the Steel City," he added without humorous intent, "comes high."

"I don't believe you can do it. You're too unpop-

ular with the organization. You've been too strong-handed. Things are ripe for a revolt. Why, you can't even control your own county!"

"When I give up hope for this county," the senator answered sharply, "you can talk. All that's been said before. How do you expect me to keep these hungry coyotes in line — by quoting golden-rule Scripture at 'em? Do you want to go back to the old guerrilla days, Sackett?"

Sackett stared moodily at his feet. Murchell took off his old straw hat and leaned against the tree. He waited until Sackett was ready to speak.

"About Parrott," Sackett said, after a long pause. "MacGregor and Flick want him for senator."

"He's slated for governor. I like my job."

"But Sherrod wants to be governor."

"He'll take what he's earned and can get," Murchell said shortly. "Parrott can have Roseben's place four years from now — maybe — we'll see."

"But they want him to have your place. They say," Sackett explained with that brutal frankness which we naturally associate with royalty, "that you're nothing but a politician and have been identified with a lot of unpopular things, while Parrott is a fine lawyer and could easily work up a reputation as a statesman. They figure he could get 'em more. And they don't care whether the Michigan gets in or not; they think they'd get better rates. And they're afraid that you and Sherrod with your squabbles will spill the milk. I'm afraid of that, too," he added gloomily.

He looked at the senator inquiringly. Murchell was staring listlessly at a brown-winged butterfly that

hovered near them, his mouth relaxed in a smile, the quality of which Sackett could not understand.

"Senator, you're getting to be an old man. You've had enough. Why don't you — retire?"

Murchell sat up suddenly as though he had received an electric shock. He caught Sackett's knee in a grip not exactly senile.

"Old, am I?" he exclaimed harshly. "Want me to retire, do you? Well, I won't. And I'll tell you why— because the organization, the power, is mine. Mine, not yours! Not your money, but my brain, put it together. I'm nothing but a disreputable politician, I'm not a polished lawyer — because I've been a slave to the organization, because I've used my power and talents for you, first to protect you from the blackmailers and then from the people. Set your mind easy. I'm too old to learn new tricks. I'll not turn agitator like these dreamers and fellows with a grievance. The Michigan won't come in, if I can help it. But Sherrod won't be governor and Parrott won't get my seat. I'm not going to give up what I've worked for all my life." He sank back against the tree. His grip on Sackett's knee relaxed. The energy died out of his voice, the gleam from his eyes.

"I guess," he said dryly, "you've said what you came to say. And you've got my answer." He looked at his watch. "If you're going to take that three o'clock train, you'd better hustle. You shouldn't have come at all."

Sackett frowned, not at the absurdity of the monarch being dismissed by his premier. "I'll think over what you've said." They rose.

Murchell gripped him again, this time by the shoulder. "You tell 'em that I like my job and that I'm not too old to run it. And, Sackett," he added, "play fair — play fair!"

Sackett left, wondering if in an enlightened, up-to-date monarchy a prime minister could have more power than his liege. Had he looked back, he would have seen the man who had never worked up a reputation as a statesman, industriously plying his hoe. Sackett would have been surprised, had he known that the senator's mind was not on the conversation just ended; he was seeing — very clearly — the gray-green eyes of a young woman and measuring himself against a young man who once had been.

After a while the senator discovered that he was digging up vines as well as weeds. He straightened up.

"I'm a sentimental old fool," he growled complainingly, "to let ghosts of the past disturb me."

He plucked a handful of grass and carefully cleaned his hoe, then walked slowly to the house.

"I guess," he said to the hired man, "you may as well hitch up. I'm going into town."

"Mighty smart-lookin' feller," the hired man suggested, "was here just now."

"That," answered Murchell, "was a gentleman who believes in the divine right of kings."

The hired man considered this statement. "Snakes! Guess he ain't a Republican then." And went to hitch up.

John was standing at the window of his court-house office. The sense of loneliness was upon him again.

It is a fact that exalted moments, when a man's ears are attuned to the voices of the growing things, come very infrequently. Between them are periods when purpose, when impulse to be a Voice, are not enough; when the task looms large and the man seems small, unequal, presumptuous. It may be that the sight of Katherine Hampden sauntering down Main Street in company with a beflanneled summer gentleman had something to do with his mood.

Then another vision was accorded him, of a fat white horse lazily drawing an ancient top-buggy in which sat Senator Murchell, for all the world a prosperous farmer passing into age amid peace and plenty. John grinned ironically at what he regarded as an obvious affectation; an injustice to the senator. The horse stopped. John watched Murchell while he tied the beast to the hitching-post and strode toward the court-house. Then the grin died away. Somehow the rugged, practical face, the big, loosely built, slightly stooping figure clad in the flowing alpaca coat seemed the very expression of power — and of something which John believed William Murchell was not. John tried to measure himself against the older man, and sighed. He turned away from the window.

A minute later came a knock at his door. "Come!" he said.

The senator entered. "Afternoon, John."

"What can I do for you?"

"Humph! don't seem very glad to see me. You might ask me to sit down."

John pointed to a chair, "Why hesitate? It's your court-house, isn't it?"

"Understood you'd taken a mortgage on it your-

self, lately." Murchell sat down, looking genially at John. The latter smoked in silence, wondering what this call might portend.

"So you think I'm a disgrace to the state?" the senator inquired at last.

"Well, just about that," John said pleasantly.

"Told Miss Roberta I'm a bad man, didn't you?"

"I could have put it stronger."

"How could you have put it?"

John did not answer at once. He stared thoughtfully at the smoke curling from his pipe.

"You aren't afraid to say it, are you?"

"No, I was just thinking how to put it," John said quietly. "I could have said that you are a shameful force in politics, that you have exploited a great party and the ignorance of the people, that you have built up a machine for the sole purpose of looting the state, that you have got and held power by compelling public servants to use the influence of their office to perpetuate your machine and by buying the votes of the corruptible. There's probably a lot more, if I only knew it. I've never heard that you have used your power for any good thing. Without profession or business you are a rich man — how? Yet you expect people to respect, to obey you without question, as though it were your right. I suppose you are honestly astounded, hurt perhaps, because I, the fellow you graciously offered to make a cat's-paw of, have turned against you?"

"Humph!" grunted Murchell, who had listened without display of feeling. "Doesn't mean much. You'd have hard work proving any of it."

"I have proved part of it. Isn't it true?"

"That isn't quite a fair question. If I say yes, I'm condemned out of my own mouth. If I say no, you won't believe me."

"Can you give me a reason for believing it isn't true?"

"You wouldn't believe my reason. Young men," said the senator sententiously, "are always pig-headed."

They relapsed into silence. John looked out of the window, awaiting in cold silence the senator's next words. Murchell preserved his usual impassive front. It was not the first time he had encountered the intolerance of youth. But never before, save during the Sheehan trial, had the intolerance pierced the crust of the man. He measured himself against the younger man. He did not sigh, as John had done; but that dull regret felt during the trial — he told himself it was because of so much power going to waste — began again.

He broke the silence. "What do you want?"

"I'm not for sale," John answered contemptuously.

"I didn't mean that. I know," Murchell said grimly, "a fool when I see one. What do you want to do?"

John turned to face him. "A good many things you wouldn't understand. Principally, I suppose, to smash you and your organization. That probably sounds funny to you."

It is on record that Goliath, meeting the belligerent David, laughed. Murchell did not laugh. He merely felt pity for an unpractical young dreamer.

"You can't smash the organization."

"It must be smashed. Because it exists to deprive the people of the right of self-government."

"A pretty phrase! It's common-sense politics. The people don't want to govern themselves — they can't. They need some one to take the burden from them. Popular government," he spoke as one gentleman to another, in confidence, "is a farce, a dream of the millenium, an ideal, impracticable. Government by a headless mob would be little short of anarchy. The men that founded this nation didn't want, didn't prepare for popular government. They wanted just what we've got — government by those capable of governing."

John remained skeptically mute.

"How are you going to smash us?"

"It may be simpler than you think, Senator Murchell. When the people understand what you are, they'll smash you."

The other smiled pityingly. "You think because you've sent a few poor devils to jail you're a man of destiny, don't you? You think I'm merely a wicked old fellow who's got power and is using it for his own selfish ends. If I were just that, you could smash me. But I'm more than that. I am an institution — a part of a necessary institution. One that society, that property, that business can't get along without. The power is mine — yes! But I hold it only because it serves to protect business from the little blackmailers on the one hand and the whims of the people on the other. I'm what you call a boss. Sentimentalists gag at the name rather than the fact. But the boss is a logical evolution. He has always

existed in some form or other — he always will. For he is the flywheel that gives stability to government and makes possible industrial development. You can smash William Murchell — that is, put some one in his place. But you can't smash the institution." He spoke sincerely. Also he forgot certain words spoken to Sackett earlier in the day. "And," he concluded, "you can't judge a system by its incidental errors."

John smiled, not very happily. "I've heard that before. The weakness of your argument is that the errors seem to be essential. Government isn't or shouldn't be merely a matter of force, nor exist only as the servant of property — even if all you say is true.

"I don't call you a wicked old fellow," he went on gravely. "I don't suppose any man is altogether bad or even wholly worthless. But we have no right to accept more of it than we must. We certainly oughtn't to compromise with it or build upon it. And — I've got to go on."

"And where'll you come out?"

"I? You will try to break me. You may succeed. But you will observe that I have little to lose. If I had much — you won't understand this — I hope I'd lose it gladly."

"Did I say I was going to break you?" Murchell demanded testily. "Why do you think I came here to-day?"

"Why?"

"To suggest that you come out for Wash Jenkins' seat in Congress."

John's reply was almost bitter. "So I have im-

pressed you as a hypocrite trying to get kicked up out of the way. I repeat, I'm not for sale."

Murchell suddenly rose and put a heavy hand on John's shoulder. "You said you have little to lose. You have much — a future. You've gone out of your way to attack me — you're a fool. But I — I like you, man. And I'd like to save that future for you."

For a moment John stared at him, incredulous. Was it possible that in the old politician lay something good, something gentle? He shook off the hand and rose. He went to the window, staring out wonderingly. . . . He saw a strange thing — Jeremy Applegate stumping across the Square and pausing under the flag, looking up. The veteran's hand rose, as though in salute; then, arrested midway, it fell limply and Jeremy marched on.

John pointed. "There, Senator, is one who entered the service of your institution. I think he was a man once. He must have been, for he risked his life for a cause — you were playing politics at the time, I believe. Now he is a broken-spirited old man with just enough soul left to be ashamed. If I became part of your machine, in the end I'd become like that — different in size perhaps, but the same in kind. I," he said quietly, "prefer your enmity; it's safer."

Murchell made no answer. He looked out of the window, no flicker of feeling on the set, rugged face. After a few moments of silence he turned and walked, still without speaking, to the door.

"You're forgetting your hat." John took it across to him. Murchell accepted it without comment.

"And," John said, "I think I begin to understand. You represent an institution. I stand for a principle, a fundamental principle. You can smash John Dunmeade — O, very easily, no doubt; but, Senator Murchell, you can't smash the principle!"

The senator did not often permit himself the luxury of losing his temper, but he was exceedingly close to it just then. He was angry, very angry. He was sure it was merely impatience with the short-sighted pig-headedness that would not listen to reason — his reason! — the impudence that dared to lecture him, the master. He would not have admitted that it was because the friendship he had offered to a young man whom he liked strangely well had been so contemptuously rejected and the hurt was all the deeper because he had broken the rule of a lifetime to make the offer. He carefully waited until the emotion had subsided, before speaking.

"It's a good deal simpler to state a principle than to follow it in practice. Any man sitting in his library can tell you how politics ought to be run; it isn't so easy when he gets out into it. And you can't judge politics by one year's experience. However —"

He stopped long enough to put on his hat.

"You went out of your way to denounce me. You took a time when I'm needing friends to do it, too. In spite of that I made you an offer in good faith. If there's anything in you, I'd have given you the chance to prove it.

"I," he concluded, and he spoke as of some divine edict, fixed and immutable, "I rarely offer friendship to those who fight me — never twice."

He went out.

CHAPTER XIV

WITH A GREAT PRICE

THE East Ridge colony was gone, scattering its charms broadcast from Lakewood to Bar Harbor. Only the Hampdens were left and they were soon to depart, Katherine and her mother to go abroad for the latter's health — which, to be sure, was so good as to be worth preserving. John and Haig had arranged to make together their farewell pilgrimage to the Ridge.

That evening John spent a great deal of care over his toilet. It could not have been out of vanity, since he surveyed very dubiously the results reflected in the mirror, and since Miss Roberta had lately been taking him to task for his careless dressing. She had merely sniffed when he gravely informed her that it did not behoove a politician to be too nattily attired. This evening, however, when she carefully inspected him, she was pleased to approve, and smilingly sped him on his way. She did not need to inquire whither that way led.

He drove to the home of Silas Hicks, where Haig, wisely avoiding the hospitality of the hotel, had his rooms. Somewhat to his dismay he was informed that Haig had discovered some mysterious errand requiring his attention, had departed a half hour earlier and had left word that he would later meet

John at their Mecca. Mrs. Hicks did not say, "Mecca." In New Chelsea it is a landlady's prerogative to know the comings and goings of her guests.

"That's funny," muttered John as he drove away.

It had been one of those oppressive days which September often brings, and in the valley the sultriness lingered. As his horse slowly climbed the Ridge Road, where some air was stirring, John ought to have felt relief. But he was decidedly uncomfortable. He strongly suspected the validity of Haig's errand and debated seriously the advisability of turning back and sending his farewells by note, pleading as excuse for his non-appearance some unexpected business matter. He solemnly assured himself that he was a fool, both for having dallied with unhappiness all summer and for going now on a journey that could only intensify futile longings.

He sustained the indictment by continuing his journey.

Unmindful of the heat, Stephen Hampden was pacing swiftly up and down the terrace. He was in a very irritable mood. He had that day received a message that a "pool" in which he was interested had unexpectedly gone to smash. It was not a fatal matter, but he hated to lose money. His cigar blinked rapidly. When John, having entrusted his modest "rig" to the groom, appeared on the terrace, Hampden confronted him.

"Good evening!" said John pleasantly.

"Evening!" growled Hampden. "Where's that crazy Haig who's always tagging around with you?"

"Isn't he here? He'll be along later, then — had some errand."

"I suppose you want to see Katherine?" Hampden's tone was so ungracious that John flushed.

"Have you any objections?" he asked quietly.

Hampden stared. "Objections? Lord, no! D'you think I'm a fool and you the hero in a dime novel? Katherine sees whoever she wants, whether I like it or not. Does that mean you're on a love-making expedition? Much good may it do you!" he grunted. "You're not my style, but I'm not worrying. She's my daughter — you get that? And Don Quixotes have gone out of fashion." Hampden spoke with more confidence than he felt, but John could not know that.

John withheld the retort that sprang to his lips. While they stood there in a silence that was exceedingly awkward for him Katherine appeared around the corner of the house. She greeted him very kindly.

"Talking to father? I'm sorry for you," she laughed. "He's cross as a bear to-night." Hampden gave a good imitation of that ill-natured animal's growl and, wheeling, resumed his pacing.

"Suppose," she suggested to John, "we find a cool place. It's so hot indoors. Mother thinks she is worn out and won't be down."

John assented, thinking, uncomfortably, that he was alone with her for the first time since their moonlight ride. He searched through the dusk for signs of Haig. They strolled, Katherine chatting unconcernedly, to a seat in a retired corner of the grounds, — only the fact would not have been significant to John — where she had sat so long after her ride with Warren Blake.

"Have you been afraid I'd propose to you again?"

She leaned back in one end of the seat. He sat at the other, as far away from her as he could, half facing her. . . . She was not really beautiful — her features were too firm for that — yet even another than John might have been excused for thinking her so in the softening light of the rising moon. She was wearing a gown of some soft pale-green stuff that did not hide the graceful lines of her figure. The filmy scarf that she wore merely called attention to the smooth white of her neck and shoulders. Her hair, never conforming to the absurdities of style, was braided in the simple fashion that best became her. Only her eyes, softly lustrous in the pale light, marked her suppressed excitement. Her arm, bare to the elbow, rested on the back of the seat; he saw its easy grace, the gentle curve of the relaxed fingers.

He shifted uneasily. "I wonder where that Haig is?"

"You're very solicitous for your new friend. Do you know, I'm rather jealous of your attractiveness. He came up here presumably to be near us — and he has found you far more interesting.— I suspect he's not coming to-night. I fancy," she laughed daringly, "he rather thinks there's something between us."

"There isn't, of course."

"Of course! So there's no reason why you shouldn't, at least, sit more comfortably." He managed a short laugh. "Do you realize this is the first time we've been alone this summer? You have really managed it very awkwardly." As though she had not done all the managing!

He had nothing to say.

"Am I such an ogress? Or have you been afraid that I'd propose to you again?"

"I haven't been fool enough to take that seriously," he said quickly. "And I'm old enough to know the danger of playing with fire. At least," he added, "I ought to have known it."

"Am I fire, then?"

"I think I'd better go home," he muttered.

"You're not afraid of me, are you, John?"

"No — but I see no good in adding to one's unhappiness."

"Ah! Do I mean that to you? I — I am sorry."

. . . He did not go. He sat, staring straight ahead of him. It was true, he was not afraid of her. But he could not help thinking of the months to come when, with less engrossing tasks to take his mind from the ache, he must renew the loneliness, grown more poignant, of the last winter. He wondered now at his weakness in letting himself, despite his knowledge of her and of what she meant to him, be drawn again within the circuit of her charm.

He became aware that she was speaking, with that amazing courage which was always hers.

"I am sorry," she repeated. "I haven't been fair to you. I overheard what father said to you. And it's true, what he meant when he said I am his daughter. The things he works for are what appeal to me, not the things you dream of. The prestige, the power — yes, the luxury — the knowledge that I belong to the men who are conquering, not dreams or ideals, count with me. It isn't very pretty, is it, from your point of view? But it's true. I — I could wish it were different. . . . Last summer it was differ-

ent. I was trying to decide what I wanted. Since one can not have everything, one must choose the things that mean most to one. I — I have always been more or less in love with you, ever since I can remember. And I saw you were beginning to care. I unsexed myself, I pursued, to learn whether you were what I wanted. I tried to believe, to make you believe, that I could have you *and* the rest. And I don't greatly blame myself for that. Because I am a woman, must I sit passively by and wait for happiness to come? . . . I was drifting between two ideals, but — struggling against it, of course — toward you. Do you know, it's your fault I didn't drift further? You wouldn't take me. You made a mistake the night of that rally — being so finical in your notions of a poor man's honor. You ought to have taken me in your arms and *made* me go to you. I should have gone — gladly — faithfully, too. . . . But you wouldn't."

He listened unresponsive to her words that, halting sometimes, fell in low, measured tones with a curious, underlying regretfulness. Her words could not add to desire, nor the knowledge that he had mistakenly held back, deepen sadness. He wondered dully if that were true: that, had he taken her, she would have gone to him?

". . . Now it is too late. I've had time to think, to weigh you against the other things. Last winter taught me how much they mean to me. And I find you — wanting. This summer has not changed that. What you ask costs too much."

"I ask nothing."

"True! I forget — you ask nothing. Last sum-

mer you need not have asked. You will do me the credit to remember that I ask you nothing that would cost more than you are willing to pay."

"That isn't true," he said in sudden roughness. "You — it is why I'm a fool for having come near you — are tempting me with every word you speak."

"Am I tempting you, I wonder?" Her voice became uncertain. "I — I beg you to believe that I haven't meant it — to remember that I shouldn't be good for you. I have no wish to — to be a Delilah."

The tremor in her voice set him to trembling. He saw the hand lying in her lap clench tightly. He raised his eyes to hers, holding them greedily. She made a sudden shrinking movement away from him, as though what she saw in his was overcoming her resolution. . . . Then — without conscious intention — he was holding her in a close, rough clasp and crying to her to go with him. She did not resist and she did not respond. She lay inert in his arms, passively suffering his hot kisses, her eyes closed, her face white.

"My dear, my dear! Don't you see? You're fighting against the thing that means your happiness. These other things that seem so big and beautiful now — in the end they'll seem small and worthless beside the one supreme thing that you want, that you need. I'm not afraid to ask now, for I know I can give you far more than you'll ever have otherwise. And you have been listening to those who don't understand. What I want to do isn't so terrible. It is very simple — I can't see why a few are so strongly against it. And it doesn't mean the sacrifice you think; already it has brought victory and the consideration of men

"My dear, my dear! Don't you see?"

you so much desire. In the end — if we have the spirit to fight and wait — it will bring us a thing that exceeds mere power. It doesn't mean your hated mediocrity. My dear, can't you see — it's your chance to escape — my dear! —" His stammering phrases halted. He became aware of her closed eyes, her unresponsiveness. She opened her eyes and looked at him. His rough clasp relaxed.

She shook her head and pushed herself away, leaning back in the seat. He did not try to hold her. He sat awkwardly beside her, the arms that had held her falling heavily, passionate eyes clinging to hers.

"Ah!" she murmured, "I gave you the cue for that, didn't I? . . . I am glad you did it. But it is too late — you can't make me want you enough."

"It isn't too late, if you care —"

"Is caring everything? You know it isn't. If it were, you wouldn't make conditions. You would use your brains, your talents, to work out a career, you would have accepted Senator Murchell's offer —"

"You know of that!"

"We see him often. Do you think I haven't been interested enough to find out all about you? Senator Murchell is right — you should have taken his advice."

"You think that?" he cried. "Then you don't care!"

"Ah!" she said resentfully, "you can say that? Do you think I could unsex myself, as I have for you, for a fancy? I — But you wouldn't understand." The resentment died down. "If I cared less, I could risk more. You make it all a matter of sentiment. It is a very practical matter. Life isn't all moon-

light. It is all very beautiful to give one's life to an ideal. And you're very splendid now in the flush of your first victory. You would be still splendid fighting a brave losing fight — while you were young. But when you were a broken-down, middle-aged failure, cast aside, a career out of the question, do you think that I — It wouldn't be romantic then. I'd be always looking up at the men I once knew, the men who were conquering, doing big things, and I'd — regret. And I'd hate you then."

"It seems," he cried bitterly, "I inspire little confidence. I'm told by every one, before I have tried long, while I am still winning, that I'm doomed to be a failure!"

"Now it is you who will not see." She became more gentle. "Do you think I could care for a weakling? It isn't you we distrust, but your ideal. I know more of politics than I did a year ago. I've read everything I could find and quizzed all the men I know until they're all laughing at my interest in you. I could bear that, because the interest is real. And I know what every one but you sees — your dream will get you only disappointment. No man ever went the way I know you will go in spite of me, and found anything but bitterness. Even the big men who have done the fine, good things for this country used the forces they found at hand, compromised with evil to create good. And their good stands."

Suddenly she leaned toward him and placed a hand on his arm. "Look, John!" She pointed to the North Star gleaming palely in the moonlight. "That star is beautiful — but it is very, very high. Can't

you understand? Ask me to go with you to the mountain top and I will go, I will help you climb; but to that star — and I can't."

She had shaken him, as she could always shake him, set him to questioning the real value of the purpose that through forces over which he had no control, as it seemed, had grown until it filled his life, excluding all else. Her face, as she leaned toward him, seemed very beautiful. In her eyes was the added luster of waiting tears. Her hand still rested on his arm, yet he found strength to answer:

"You've said it yourself — caring isn't everything."

She remained in the same eager posture for a moment, as though waiting for other words to fall; but none came. Her hand fell from his arm. She sat back, sighing. He leaned forward and buried his face in his hands. Around them rose the shrilling of the crickets and the whispering of the leaves, in the night hymn. Once it had been to them a glad, inspiring song; now they heard no music in it. For a time that seemed to be endless they sat thus.

At last he got to his feet, slowly. She, too, rose. He stood gazing away over the hills, face uplifted to the moonlight, as though he beheld some transfiguring vision; he seemed almost to have forgotten her. With a sudden jealous contraction of her heart she realized how little of the grief she had thought to see was in his look. Strength was there, the strength to suffer and to withstand; and something else, almost a glow, the reflection of a spirit handed down to this man across the generations from an age of martyrs

who were glad to pay for their faith. With a great price he was paying for his faith, and it became the more precious to him.

She, with her narrow experience among those to whom consecration is a meaningless word and martyrdom a consummation devoutly to be shunned, understood but dimly. It meant little to her; yet she saw enough to know that the clean-minded, sunny-tempered young man whom she had touched had passed beyond her, was then proof against her lure. In after years, when understanding had come, she would often think wonderingly upon him as he stood there, a Nazarite undefiled, listening with soul finely sensitive to his call.

She found the need to justify herself before him.

"At least," she said unsteadily, "you will remember that I didn't pretend until it was too late for you to escape me, and then worry you into going my way, as many women have done. I'm not quite so selfish as that.— Am I wholly contemptible?"

He judged her generously.

"You aren't contemptible. It is only that you don't love. Love doesn't haggle or try to drag down. You have mistaken, honestly mistaken, something else for it. If you cared — but you don't. You will find that out soon."

For a little she looked at him unwaveringly. Then her strength seemed to wilt.

"You are right, I suppose. And I have missed a great deal."

She turned and walked wearily toward the house. He followed, one pace behind her. At the terrace she stopped, whispered "Good-by," and went in.

BOOK TWO

FIGS AND THISTLES

CHAPTER XV

LOCUSTS AND WILD HONEY

A SON of the old régime, returning to New Chelsea after four years, would have found vast changes wrought. To begin with, he could have come on the express, and he would have alighted at the new yellow-brick station. Probably, being human, he would have succumbed to the representations of the uniformed Jehu and been whirled in the highly varnished 'bus, over paved streets, to the new five-story hotel, where a room with bath could be had. The business "block" had expanded into a "section." A prodigal quantity of paint had given the older town the air of having donned its Sunday best. To the north, in Blake's first addition, stood many new dwellings, more or less smart, homes of toilers in Plumville who traveled to and from their vocations on the trolley and on the way read in the daily *Globe* the news of "our city" and of the world. The summer colony on East Ridge had passed beyond the experimental stage and become a sure source of pride and income to New Chelsea. Only the court-house square and the colonial mansion across Main Street, touched by the pathos with which landmarks of old régimes are always invested, had escaped the hand of transformation.

Nor was the prosperity thus attested merely the

crumbs from the table of thriving Plumville. It was all New Chelsea's own and it had come by the avenue of Stephen Hampden's speculation. For the coal company, despite the rules of the game, was a success for all concerned; already it was paying dividends. Hence the lifting of many mortgages and the building of new barns in the townships. One who had refused a share in that epoch-making promotion often thought with secret chagrin upon the fallibility of his judgment.

But a great deal more than a "boom" can happen in four years. That number of cycles saw William Murchell's power shaken, totter and crash to the earth.

Ministries have been resuscitated, if not resurrected from the grave. But it is indubitably true that there was a period during which Murchell's hands held not the reins of power. Most people credited this fact to the craft of Mark Sherrod, state treasurer and the new minister, and his able lieutenant, Governor Parrott. Murchell would have placed the credit — or blame — elsewhere. Had he had the habit of discussing his mistakes, he would have added a year to our calculation and said that the initial blow had been struck at his power when on a certain June day, in company with Jim Sheehan, he had sought to press a bright-faced young man into his service. It was well he did not give voice to such an opinion; probably, as illustrating his failing powers, it would have precipitated the crash. The young man himself would have smiled skeptically.

If it was your good fortune to be a resident of New Chelsea at that time, you will remember how John Dunmeade appeared when he was thirty-five. A

grave, quiet man looking older than his years, as carelessly dressed as men are apt to be who are dreaming of big things. His hair was beginning to thin at the temples. The gray-green eyes were set deeper in their sockets, over which the heavy brows hung lower. His wide orator's mouth was less mobile than it had been when he set out to destroy an institution. He walked with a slight stoop and with less spring — the long, slow stride of a man who thinks much on his feet.

If you stopped to speak to him, he would smile pleasantly and chat cheerfully, in a voice from which much speaking in open air and draughty halls had taken the " silver," about the weather or the state of the crops, or, if you gave him the opening, very earnestly about politics. He made it a point, however unhappily his Cause was progressing, never to seem downcast. You would leave him, probably thinking it a pity that such an attractive man should be so unpractical and the object of so many bitter and powerful enmities. Express this thought to the next passer-by, and you would be answered with a shrug of indifference, angry denunciation or cautious defense, representing the divisions of public opinion. If the truth must be told, New Chelsea was more than a little disappointed in John Dunmeade.

His health was not always good. He had suffered a serious illness during one winter and, between the duties of office, the cares of a growing private practice and the incessant labors of politics, his body had been sadly overtaxed. He was still district attorney, last trophy of the reform wave that had swept over the shattered machine. He had suffered many disillusionments. The ticket nominated so easily and

subsequently elected had proved a disappointment; its mutual jealousies, conceited unreasonableness and susceptibility to machine blandishments had aroused a general disgust. Under the leadership of Greene, an ex-gambler and former lieutenant of Sheehan, less obviously the brute and far shrewder than the deposed boss, the Plumville organization had risen from its ashes. New Chelsea and the townships remained diminishingly loyal to John, but with the majorities from Plumville, which had sunk back into characteristic lethargy, Greene had recaptured all the county offices, except when John, a candidate for reëlection, had won through personal popularity and by scant margin for himself what he could not obtain for his other candidates.

Politics is a hard taskmaster. John found poor compensation in the fact that he had become well known throughout the state. The year after the Benton County reform he had joined himself to the cause of Judge Gray, an honest and capable lawyer who dared to ask the Republican nomination for governor against the organization's choice. With the judge John made a vigorous stumping campaign in every county of the state. He was new, he was enthusiastic, he was daring. People listened. Parrott was nominated easily according to the "slate." But here and there, especially in the farm counties, interest had been awakened in the young fellow who spoke so well and so forcefully. A few even carried interest to the extreme of thinking seriously of what he had said.

Judge Dunmeade was not nominated to the supreme court that year; hence the breach of a lifelong

friendship, increased bitterness against his son and many I-told-you-sos from Miss Roberta.

Before long others began to take an interest in the man who, "crazy as Jerry Brent," so persistently attacked the bosses of his party, who spoke and wrote in season and out, preaching his gospel of political righteousness. The interest was not always friendly. Occasional ironical editorials appeared with him as the target; politicians sneered at him; nasty rumors, which after a few futile attempts he ceased to answer, bobbed about concerning his personal life.

But John preached on. He did more than attack; he devised and proffered remedies with a naïve disregard of the conservative habit of the American mind that incited mirth in some, apprehension in others and bewilderment in still others. He was not narrow; when other Voices devised other remedies, he cheerfully substituted them for, or added them to his own. "Dunmeade's platform" became a standing joke among the politicians. It is not necessary here to enumerate its articles. They have since become respectable.

His understanding of politics was far deeper than when he chose a smooth, round pebble for his sling and went forth to slay a giant. He now saw beyond the champion into the Philistine camp. He was learning, in common with other young iconoclasts, something of the existence and character and aims of the personal government which lay behind the formal, and of the marvelously woven system by which the dominant personalities twisted the form of government to their purpose. Being a young man who thought himself inspired, he was aghast — and the

more determined to destroy that system. Not wholly lacking a sense of proportion, he realized the temerity of him who undertook such wholesale destruction.

But his youthful optimism had not failed, and he had evolved a simple theory from which neither attack, argument nor failure could lure him. The people were really good and supremely desired good; political and social ills were accidents and existed only because of popular ignorance of their import; the ills in question were extremely evident to any one looking in their direction. *Ergo,* all that was necessary was to call the people's attention to the machine and its relation to wealth, and the people would do the rest; an enlightened public conscience was an invincible and unerring force. His task was to expound the machine to the people of his state.

He was, it must be confessed, rather staggered at times, receiving some fresh evidence of the reluctance of the public conscience to be enlightened.

Nevertheless he held on. And he used characteristic means. Compromises and deals he rejected as scornfully as he had rebuffed Murchell. His weapon was truth; its brightness must not be stained nor its edge dulled by dalliance with evil! For, he said, grapes do not grow on thorns nor figs on thistles.

Always he saw victory just one year ahead.

In those days — to be exact, three years after the destruction of the Sheehan machine — the political seas began to toss angrily. Heavy, ominous clouds hung over the horizon. There was strife in the organizations of both parties. Upon the devoted heads of Murchell and Duffy, the respective bosses, hurtled abuse from strange quarters. Anxious cries rang

from the deck of the ship Murchell had steered so long. Then the storm burst.

The biennial election of a state treasurer was at hand. There appeared to John one day a plausible gentleman who discussed the troubled waters. He was in a state of righteous indignation. Murchell's domination had continued too long! Patience with his tyrannical ways had ceased to be a virtue. His unfitness had been proved by his breach of contract to let Sherrod succeed Beck. And he, the messenger, was glad to say, in confidence, that those able and distinguished patriots and leaders, Mark Sherrod and Philander Parrott, were organizing a revolt and proposed to make the treasurership nomination a test of strength. And they had commissioned him to urge that other able, etc., John Dunmeade, the man who had "licked Murchell in his own backyard," to join the reform. He was deeply hurt when John refused.

Haig, who also had made New Chelsea his legal residence, invented sundry lurid epithets to describe John's folly and urged reconsideration. John shook his head.

"But I thought you wanted to put Murchell out of business?"

"Not Murchell. I've grown past that. I'm rather sorry for him just now. And I'd rather have him run things than Sherrod. It's the institution we've got to destroy — as he told me himself once. Nothing's gained if we substitute one boss for another."

"Then what are you going to do, my destructive friend?"

"Try to slip in between them, I think — put up an independent candidate."

"Ouch!" Haig's hands gave a pantomimic illustration of the grinding upper and nether millstones.

"Do those gyrations perhaps mean something?"

"I'm thinking," Haig grinned, "what'll happen to you when you're caught between them. There won't be enough left of you to bring home."

"I suppose not," John grinned back.

Haig stared. "You suppose not! Then why the devil are you going into it?"

"Somebody's got to keep on fighting," John said, almost shamefacedly; oft-encountered skepticism was rendering him reluctant to put his ideals into words. "And there isn't likely to be anybody else."

"O — sugar!" With which mild expletive Haig left him.

John made his campaign. When the primaries had been held, he was himself astonished to discover that nearly a quarter of the delegates chosen were pledged to his independent candidate.

He went to the now historic convention. The night before it convened he spent in his modest rooms trying to keep his Spartan band intact against the two-sided attacks made upon it. But he could not give the quality of encouragement they required. In parlor A of the State Hotel sat Murchell and in parlor B of the Lochinvar sat Sherrod, recklessly bidding against each other for votes. In thronged, smoke-reeking lobbies excitement — and avarice — ran high. Men boasted almost openly of the amounts they had received for their pledges. The most admired was he who, slapping first one fat pocket and then another, fatter, declared, "This is Murchell — and this Sherrod!" Rumors of a *coup d'etat* planned for the

morning were rife; and *coups d'etat* meant plunder! Between the two headquarters the delegates, in a sickening frenzy of greed, hovered like flies between two honey-pots. Before daylight John learned that he had been used to draw delegates from Murchell for Sherrod's purpose; he saw his band dwindle to a faithful handful.

When the convention met, Sherrod was in control. After the preliminaries John, answering to the roll-call of counties, placed his candidate in nomination in a speech that could hardly be heard for jeers and cat-calls. It was brought to an abrupt conclusion by a yell from the gallery, "Sit down, sonny. Only money talks in this convention!" Even the delegates joined in the roar of laughter. And then the coup was accomplished. The Parrott-Sherrod candidate was withdrawn and Sherrod himself substituted. Amid confusion that mounted almost to a riot he was nominated. As the chairman announced the result, the tumult subdued. All eyes sought Murchell. There was a momentary hush, as though even the greed-sodden delegates felt a pathos in this overthrow of a strong man. Then riot broke out anew. . . .

A non-partizan candidate was put up that fall. John and Jerry Brent were most active in his support. They made what was said to be a remarkable campaign. A cartoon, representing them as two long-legged boys leaping over mountains and valleys and scattering speeches broadcast with both hands, did not much overdraw. And in every county they were met with tremendous enthusiasm. People flocked by thousands to hear them and cheered themselves hoarse as the young orators excoriated the bosses.

John, who had entered the campaign with little thought of victory, found hope rising within him, came to believe they would win. On the night before election he was quoted in the newspapers as saying solemnly, "The people will win. They have discerned a principle." . . . It is one thing to secure an audience; it is quite another to get votes. On election day the people marched to the polls, voted as they had always done and elected the Republican ticket by a majority of more than one hundred thousand.

That campaign fixed John's place firmly in the public mind. This place, one that a practical man would have thought twice before seeking, was won at the cost of much of his buoyant optimism. It almost cost him his life also. A heavy cold contracted during the last days of the campaign eventually settled into a stubborn case of pneumonia. There were many anxious days in the Dunmeade home. Nor was Miss Roberta's anxiety unshared. Through three consecutive nights Hugh Dunmeade never sought his couch, but kept a constant vigil by his son's bedside, listening to the painful breathing and, without protest, to the reproaches of an inner voice. Exposure in the cold room aggravated his rheumatism, but Miss Roberta, strangely enough, did not scold him. When the Christmas holidays arrived John was still confined to his room.

That winter Senator Murchell varied his program by spending the congressional recess at his legal residence.

And one Sunday morning he came face to face with the judge and Miss Roberta in the vestibule of the

Presbyterian Church. It was the first meeting in more than two years.

"Why, how do you do, Roberta?" said the senator. "How are you, Judge?"

There was none of the season's good will in the answers.

"How do you do?" echoed Miss Roberta.

"Good morning, sir," said the judge.

"I'm not sure," smiled the senator genially, with conciliatory intent, "whether your greeting, Judge, is judicial or *extra*judicial."

But the pun was lost on his audience and the olive branch ignored.

The judge glared glacially. "I should like nothing better than to meet you judicially, sir."

"I don't doubt it," replied the senator meekly. He turned to Miss Roberta. "How is John?"

"He is better."

"The doctor tells me he ought to go South and won't. If it's on account of — er — money matters," the senator looked carefully out into the street, "I'll be glad to help out."

Miss Roberta seemed to add several inches to her stature. "We hardly expected this from you."

"This is personal only," Murchell hastened to defend himself. "I wouldn't lift a finger for him politically. But I want him to live long enough to reap the reward of his folly." His tone implied that John's life would not be brightened by the prospect of that reward.

"No, sir," the judge put in stiffly. "If John needs money, it is my right to provide it." It had not occurred to him before to exercise the right.

"Stuff!" said the senator. "I know how you're fixed, Hugh. You can't afford it. I can."

"We Dunmeades, Senator Murchell, don't accept charity from our political enemies."

"Our political enemies! Have you turned reformer, Judge?" Murchell inquired innocently. "I thought you didn't believe in agitation."

"At least, my son is an honorable gentleman," the judge retorted. "He doesn't go about deceiving his friends with promises he has no intention of keeping." Here the judge certainly scored.

"He deceived me. Or rather," Murchell corrected himself honestly, "he let me deceive myself."

"Both of you," Miss Roberta interpolated, "are taking too much for granted. John isn't a pauper."

"His kind of politics doesn't cost much money." Beyond a doubt it was a field day for the judge.

"Maybe his kind isn't worth much," Murchell returned sententiously.

"If you old children want to stand here quarreling in the house of God, you may," said Miss Roberta impatiently. "I'm going in. Good morning, Will Murchell."

The judge stiffly followed her, leaving the breach wider than ever. Neither gentleman, we may suspect, heard much of the sermon that morning.

Later, Miss Roberta and her brother were sitting before their library fire, waiting for dinner. Conversation had lagged.

"Did you notice," she broke the silence abruptly, "how poorly Will Murchell was looking this morning?"

She was astonished at the mildness of the reply.

"I was thinking of that, Roberta. Do you suppose his offer was his way of holding out a flag of truce?"

"I have a suspicion that it was, Hugh."

"I wonder," he continued, "how far we ought to distinguish between the politician and the man?"

"The politician is the man."

"Not always," the judge contradicted. "Often he is just the man bent out of shape by his environment."

"Humph! John isn't bent out of shape."

This was incontrovertible, and the judge turned the drift of the discussion. "I wish," he sighed, "they could work in harmony. It looks as though Sherrod has beaten William. And Sherrod is a — a damned rascal, Roberta. It's a terrible condition when the Republican party falls into the hands of such a man. I suppose," he added irrelevantly, "after all, I'm not big enough to fill a justiceship."

"Can you be as charitable to your son?" she demanded.

"John," declared the judge, with ill-concealed pride, "doesn't need charity from me or any one else. Only justice. He's an honest but misguided man."

At another time Miss Roberta narrated the two conversations to John. His only comment was a shake of the head and, "If only human nature could be reduced to thumb rules!"

"It can't," said Miss Roberta wisely. "Don't try it."

"Haig," John smiled, "says that's my weakness — trying to explain and convince people by the obvious. I'm sometimes afraid he's right."

Others than Senator Murchell overstepped a custom to spend the Yule-tide in New Chelsea. To John, by way of Haig and Miss Roberta, came rumors of a very gay house party on the Ridge that had been led by some strange whim to experience the novelty of a country Christmas.

John was alone in his room one day, reading, when his aunt, nose and ears still tingling from the December frost, entered. In her arms reposed a bulky, heavily-wrapped parcel. Without explanation and with an air of deep mystery she knelt before the fire and began to undo the numerous wrappings. At last, to John's curious eyes was revealed an armful of red roses. He exclaimed his pleasure with all the emphasis demanded by the occasion and her evident delight in the offering.

"But where did you get them? You haven't been breaking into somebody's greenhouse, have you? Or — my gracious, Aunt Roberta! — have you taken to beaux again?"

She ignored both suggestions as beneath contempt.

"I've been up on the Ridge."

"On the Ridge!"

"Such goings on! Grown-ups sliding down hill on a bobsled. And enjoying it!" The offense against good taste evidently lay in the enjoyment.

"Maybe that's why they do it," he laughed. "Did I understand you to say," carelessly, "the flowers came from up there?"

"I went to call," she explained, "on Katherine Hampden. They were asking about you and somebody suggested sending flowers. So that little Miss

Haines went over the house and got together all they had."

"Oh!"

"Katherine helped her," she added. "She suggested it."

"That was very good of her."

Miss Roberta, still on her knees, straightened up suddenly.

"John, she isn't engaged yet."

"Isn't she? Now that's an interesting and important piece of news," he answered briskly. "How do you know it?"

"I asked her."

"Undoubtedly," he laughed, "you have the courage of your curiosity."

"Why isn't she engaged?" Miss Roberta demanded.

"Is that a conundrum? Probably, I should say, because she hasn't found any one with the required combination of talents and possessions. Or it may be she has found him and he — let us not be too ungallant — doesn't know it. Such things happen, you know."

"John, it isn't too late for you."

"It isn't too — why, my gracious! Aunt Roberta, have you been mistaking me all this time for the lovelorn hero of the melodrammer? You're a very persistent person, I see. But it was always too late. She likes nice, sleek, prosperous gentlemen. Honestly now, you could never fit that description to me, could you?" He laughed very heartily.

She looked at him keenly, rose to her feet and went

down-stairs to procure a vase for the flowers. When she returned, he was staring oddly at them. What she read in his expression was not at all mirth. She began to fill the vase.

"Suppose," he interrupted the operation, abruptly, "you take the flowers down-stairs. They — the odor is a little too heavy."

"I thought," she said quietly, "your laugh was overdone. John, how much had your politics to do with — it?"

"A little. She thinks I am a fool. I've found," he added, "that that opinion isn't peculiar to her."

"John," she pleaded wistfully, "why won't you quit? You've done enough."

"Down in your heart, do you want me to quit, Aunt Roberta?"

"Politics has been the ruination of our family. It made your grandfather a scheming, selfish hypocrite. It's made Hugh a bumptious, egotistic place-seeker and a disappointed, saddened old man. And it's making you —"

"What is it making me?"

"O, we Dunmeades are all fools!"

"*We* 'Dunmeades'! You know you never did a foolish thing in your life, Aunt Roberta," he smiled.

"Yes, I did," she answered grimly. "I — I like your kind of foolishness."

Reckless of scratching thorns and fragile stems, she snatched up the roses, so roughly as to send a shower of crimson petals to his feet, and started to leave him. But he reached out and caught her by the arm.

"Aunt Roberta," he said, with a flash of the boyishness he had almost lost, "you're the worst hum-

bug in Christendom. You think you're crabbed and cranky and practical, when really you're just a generous, great-hearted, romantic old dear. You think you've missed something big and wonderful and you're afraid I'm missing it, too. Maybe you have. Maybe I am. But there are more ways than one of finding romance and happiness. Just because one of them fizzles out is no excuse for going through life posing the grand, gloomy and peculiar. So leave me to my reforming and don't fret about me. I have confuted all the poets. I solemnly declare, I am not an unhappy man."

"Are you telling the truth?" she asked quietly.

The flash of boyishness subsided. "I think I am," he answered gravely.

But afterward, when she had gone, he carefully gathered up the fallen petals and tossed them into the fire. He watched them quickly shrivel and disappear.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FORERUNNER

HE went South. The doctor had prescribed three months' rest. John was back in New Chelsea in one, preparing with dogged energy to begin a new campaign against the state machine. That the giant he must attack was now Sherrod, not Murchell, to his mind but increased the need for fighting.

The campaign that followed was but a weary repetition of other years, without the stimulus of hope. The spasm of enthusiasm past, the people had sunk back into habitual lack of interest. Vainly John struggled to impress upon the state the vitality of his issue; toward the end of the campaign close observers began to detect a tinge of personal bitterness in his charges against Sherrod and Murchell. The only notable political feature of that year was the quiet contest within the organization between the old boss and the new; a struggle in which Murchell was forced to yield.

It is easy enough to cite the length of time required for the building of Rome. But when a man sees the best years of his life slipping away with no accomplishment; when he has suffered not only denunciation and misrepresentation, which are not easy to bear, but also treachery and ridicule, which are harder, and misunderstanding and indifference from the people he is

trying to serve, which are hardest of all; when he has seen a few promising harvests wither fruitless to the earth: he needs more than old saws to sustain his courage. He can not be greatly blamed for wanting sometimes to "chuck the game," as Haig put it to John one evening.

It was early winter again. Haig and John were in the latter's office. The rows of books and battered, easy furniture, lighted up by the student lamp and the fire in the open iron stove, made a very comfortable lounging-place for men who were not sybaritic in tastes, and they often foregathered there. The bantering friendship between them, grown deeper as the years passed, had been worth more to John than he quite realized.

"Why don't you chuck the game?"

"Politics?"

"Yes. What's the use? You've given up the five best years of your life for nothing. You've got just far enough to be hated, but not feared, by both gangs. You're laughed at as a freak, denounced as dangerous, lied about — Why, do you know, the other day in the Steel City I heard you were keeping a woman —"

John flushed. "There isn't any truth —"

"Don't I know that? But others are willing to believe it. We're all glad enough to think ill of a good man, nasty, greasy hypocrites that we are, with our surreptitiously vicious lives! Bah!" Haig spit disgustedly. "And where's it brought you? Nowhere! You're further back than you were four years ago. The novelty's worn off, the dear pee-pul's tired of hearing you and they believe that somehow you're

worse than an anarchist. And you're even going to be kicked out of office here next spring — do you know that? You're breaking down your health. You're doing the work of three men and a small boy — for nothing! This county is growing — there's going to be plenty of law business. And you could be the biggest lawyer around here — you are that now in point of ability, though the Lord knows where you find time to study your cases. Why don't you chuck it?"

John merely shook his head, smiling.

"I don't mean, to go over to one of the gangs. Throw the whole thing overboard. Stick to business, save money and grow old comfortably and lazily instead of by leaps and bounds, as you are now. Why, you're only thirty-five — and you look forty-five!"

"I know all that. I might think of it, if there was any one to take my place."

"Your place! What right have you to think you're the Lord's Anointed?"

"None at all, judging by my lack of success, I suppose."

"Exactly! It gets nothing either for you or your cause. Serving the people is the most worthless, thankless job in the world."

"You besotted cynic!" John laughed. "What if we don't get any farther forward? We can't let 'em have the state by default, can we? And it isn't altogether thankless. Once in a while I run into men like Cranshawe or Criswell or Sykes. When I see how they depend on me, I — I have to stick it out. It isn't necessarily worthless, either. I've generally found that if you hold on to the breaking-point, and then

hold on a little longer, things get easier all of a sudden."

"Sunday-school aphorisms! When you're holding on to the tail of a mule and it begins to kick, you don't hold on, do you? The trouble with you is, you don't know when you're kicked out. But I suppose," Haig growled his disgust, "there's no use talking to a fanatic. What's to be the next slaughter of the innocents?"

"We elect a governor next year."

"And where'll you find a candidate?"

"Well," John said cheerfully, "I could run myself, you know."

"And offer 'em more bread pills, eh?" He referred to "Dunmeade's platform." Haig was trying to decide whether he was a socialist or not, hence was critical of all remedies and theories.

"I suppose you are thinking of your brotherhood as a substitute?"

"Not *my* brotherhood!" Haig snorted. "I wouldn't have the dolts you call the people as my brothers. They're interesting to me only as a study in asininity. You're more of a socialist than I am, with your notions of service and reward measured by social value. Only you're afraid of the name. No wonder nobody wants your pellets! If there's anything wrong at all, it's in our vitals and requires real medicine. The trouble with this nation is, we were suckled on the sanctity of the individual, gilded selfishness. We've gone daft on the rights of individual strength. We're every man thinking only of his own desires — which we call rights — consequently we don't give a hang about the rights of other individuals.

What can you expect of a people whose very ideal is concentrated selfishness?"

"But, Haig, most of us earn all we get," John interposed mildly.

"More, man, more! But that's because the strong individuals who run things compel us to, so they may reap our sowing. We protect, make it easy for those men, because we all think we're strong and hope to follow their example. We're afraid to cramp the other fellow for fear we bind ourselves. Your dainty nostrils are offended because some men take bribes, others misuse government and a few boss the rest of us. And you offer the initiative,— direct primaries, publicity of campaign funds, government control and more tommyrot! You can't see that political corruption is the logical, inevitable result in a nation where nobody is thinking of anybody but himself."

"But the people don't understand — that's all."

"Not understand! You can say that! Do you suppose there's an intelligent man in the state who doesn't know that you have as much brains and capacity for government, and far more character, than either Murchell or Sherrod or any of their tribe? Yet they turn you down for them every time. Why? *Because the Murchells and the Sherrods represent the people.* You don't. Ninety-nine out of a hundred men, all over the nation, have a pretty clear notion of what's going on in politics and government, and they have a rudimentary social instinct that tells them it is wrong. Sometimes that incipient sense gets them interested in a reform, but the interest lasts only for about one campaign. Just as you have found it. We don't really care. We don't want things changed.

Because politics as it is, exactly represents the national and personal ideals of the people. The trouble is, we are living in a social state when we can't think, much less feel, socially."

"But —"

"Here, I have the floor.—Things are rotten — yes! There's a stink in every plane of our national life. You can better them in two ways. You can choose the brotherhood — and we may put that aside as possible only after a process of civilization as slow as the one that evolved that polished egoist, the American citizen. Or you can use the means you find to hand — the only way the world has ever been bettered — by the big despots who looked at means in the light of the end and kicked the people forward. You think you have a purpose in life, to clean up this state and help make government in fact the social agency it is in theory. Well, then — play the game as you find it, make of yourself a despot. And when you have your power, use it to win compromises from the other strong ones, and to give the people just as much as they are able to use and enjoy. Among a selfish people only a supreme, practical egoist can lead. Selfishness is the only thing they understand, therefore, it is the only thing they will follow."

Haig sat back, relighting his pipe. "Gosh!" he grinned. "Reminds me of my college debating society. But I mean it," he added earnestly.

John smiled faintly. He leaned forward and caught up the poker, absently jabbing the coals in the stove. The flames leaped, lighting up the thought-lined face, both refined and strengthened by the years. Haig, whose business it was to read faces, thought he

saw in John's almost sadness; he wondered if the futile battling had meant more suffering than had appeared. John was thinking of another time when, out of her ignorance, a young woman had stumbled, far less cleverly, upon the same theory.

He stirred the fire, without speaking, until the poker was red hot and the dancing flames hummed in the iron stove. "Can you add to that?" he said at last.

"I can elaborate."

"You needn't. I have thought of it all and more. I think you have hit upon the root of the matter. Our politics does reflect our national aspirations — or lack of them. And a boss such as you speak of, a man who could hold and use power without succumbing to its temptations, could accomplish much. At least, I think so; we have none of the sort. But not all — one must build from the bottom upward. The nation can be saved from its sins neither by strong individuals nor by mechanical systems. Only by the aroused moral sense of the people, a realization and acceptance of political responsibility.— And a man can't very successfully preach political morality unless he practises it."

Haig threw up his hands in a gesture of desperation. "You're so stuck on your job of being a voice in the wilderness that you won't listen to common sense. You're too infernally near perfection to be true. Will you kindly step outside and steal a chicken or cut a throat or commit some other little human sin?"

John did not seem to notice the interruption. "After all," he said slowly, as though he were thinking aloud, "a man has to serve in the way for which

he's best fitted. I don't think I'm cut out for a boss, Haig. And we can never be a brotherhood until we are made to feel it — and a few men are willing to live it."

Haig growled again. "Brotherhood — piffle! Service — who wants your service? What you need is some woman to come along and marry you out of hand and teach you common sense. Why didn't you marry Katherine Hampden when you had the chance?"

"I never really had the chance," John replied calmly.

"O, go to the devil!" And with characteristic abruptness Haig rose and walked out of the office.

A minute later he reappeared, to demand, "Do you still want to?"

"Want to what?" said John, so blankly that Haig again recommended the devil as his ultimate destination and withdrew.

Out in the street he stopped long enough to look back through the window. John was still absently jabbing the coals. It seemed to the man outside that the hint of sadness in the firelit face had deepened, as though John, left alone, were facing and yielding to the dejection he never let others see. Haig shook his head and passed on, muttering to the snowy night:

"I have seen a miracle. A man who has tested yet believes in the people, and who has loved the same woman through five years. I wonder how long his courage will hold out?"

John drew up to the desk and began a letter. It did not progress rapidly. His pen had gone as far as, "Replying to your favor of the 20th inst.," when it

fell unnoticed from his fingers. He returned to his contemplation of the fire.

He was thinking of Katherine Hampden. He had been thinking of her a great deal lately, after a long period in which he had kept the remembrance of her in the secret, rarely-opened chamber of his innermost consciousness.

Strong men and women, romanticists to the contrary notwithstanding, do not die from disappointment in love; they do not permit it to wreck their lives nor even allow themselves the weak indulgence of sorrowful brooding. They turn to work, that panacea of all ills of the heart, and in absorbing other interests find surcease from suffering. Thus had John ruled himself and he had been amazed to learn, in infrequent moments of relaxation and self-examination, how heavy a load a man can carry without staggering. It did not occur to him that he might find elsewhere a more fruitful love.

It had been the easier to bury, if not completely to forget the past, because Katherine's life and his had not often crossed. One summer she and her mother had been abroad. During other summers, not wholly by design, he had found it convenient to be away most of the time. They had met once in New Chelsea, a casual, brief meeting on the street in the presence of others. The incident of the flowers has been told. Another time he and Haig, going down to the city for the luxury of an evening of opera, had seen her in one of the boxes; he had resisted Haig's importunities to present themselves. And then one day, a week before the conversation just narrated, they had accidently met.

He was in the Steel City to deliver his lecture on *Civic Responsibility* before one of the reform bodies that discussed but did nothing to alleviate the city's ills. For early luncheon he went into a restaurant where elaborate trappings and service enabled the patron to ignore the moderately well cooked food and immoderately high prices.

As he was passing through the foyer, he came face to face with Katherine Hampden and another lady, whose attire proclaimed her one of fashion's elect. There was a moment's hesitation and then impulsively Katherine held out her hand. Mutual inquiries concerning each other's health followed, were satisfactorily answered, and Katherine introduced him to her companion. Mrs. Deland nodded distantly, as from a great height, down upon the rather countrified-looking man who carried the queer, black slouch hat.

"This is *the* Mr. Dunmeade," Katherine explained.

"O, indeed!" was the murmured answer, accompanied by a vacuous smile. Mrs. Deland, it was clear, had never heard of "the Mr. Dunmeade." Just then another group entered the foyer and with scant ceremony she escaped to join them.

Katherine flushed slightly and her head went up a little higher — defiantly, John thought. "Cat!" she said spitefully. "You don't mind, do you?"

His answer was sufficiently careless to satisfy her on this point, and the inquiries were extended to include the members of their respective families.

"Rose in bloom," he thought with truth. He did not give the credit to the beautiful hat or the perfectly tailored suit or the expensive furs. He was

thinking only of the woman. There was about her still the same splendor of health and strength; also, he told himself, a deeper womanliness. In her manner was more repose, less of the suggestion of hardness that, even in moments when he had most felt her attraction, had been so palpable. He wondered at it. He knew that she had had all those things which she desired, for which she had chosen against him.

The inquiries were exhausted. There was another moment of uncertainty. John was getting ready to leave, when Katherine — perhaps she saw the curious glances from Mrs. Deland's group — said with a sudden frank friendliness, "There isn't any reason why we shouldn't have a nice, chummy little chat, is there? I am not with her. I am waiting for Mr. Gregg — who is always late. Shall we sit down somewhere?"

He assented, and they ensconced themselves on a luxurious davenport with which the foyer was equipped.

"He is still faithful, you see," she laughed. Obviously she referred to Gregg.

"That is a sufficiently rare quality to be a distinction, isn't it?" His smile, she noted, if less luminous, was as pleasant as ever.

"In my case, he is an isolated distinction, then," she laughed again. "They are preparing to lay me on the shelf. I am almost twenty-nine, you may remember. And they are beginning to put me on boards and committees and things already!"

"I hardly know whether to call that an exaggeration or an understatement."

"It is the literal truth."

He did not see how that could be.

"O, very easily!" she assured him. "In spite of old sayings about beauty being only skin deep, men still prefer youth and freshness in women. And their idea of youth is extreme immaturity. It is suspected in some quarters that I rouge."

He smiled his skepticism.

"No, I don't, though no doubt I'll come to it in time.— About yourself. You have had some very interesting experiences, haven't you? I keep tab on you through the newspapers. Only I fear I don't get a very fair notion of what you are doing, as I see only the *Gazette*. Do you ever read it?"

"Sometimes, as a sort of penance for my sins."

"You have sins, then?" Her mock surprise was good.

"You can read the *Gazette* and doubt it? Very many," he replied promptly.

"O, that reminds me!" She became grave. "I heard a very unkind story about you the other day. It was absurd, of course. I wish to say, I did not believe a word of it. Can't men be just in politics?"

"O, one gets used to that sort of thing." He thought of a retort he might have made.

Apparently she, too, thought of it, for she went on hastily. "It was in answering that story that a man paid you a very fine compliment. Ought I to tell you, I wonder? Or do you receive so many that one more wouldn't interest?"

"It is when we get few that a compliment is dangerous. I'm not sure — but I'll risk it," he said idly.

"He said, 'A man can't keep on preaching decency

as earnestly and bravely as Dunmeade does unless he's a pretty decent sort of chap himself.' I don't mind telling you it was Mr. Gregg who said that." She did not add that it was her father who, with evident enjoyment, had narrated the story, or that Gregg had qualified his compliment with, "Of course, he's a crank."

"That was kind of Gregg."

"He often speaks of you. He admires you and is very much interested in your — career. We may call it that, mayn't we?"

"If you can't think of a better word." He wished it were not necessary to bring Gregg's name so often into the conversation.

They talked for a few minutes longer, on uninteresting, impersonal subjects until they saw Gregg appear at the entrance. John caught up the hat Mrs. Deland had eyed so uncharitably; it was a very good hat of its kind. But that lady effusively waylaid Gregg, and there was an awkward pause which John did not know how to bridge.

While they were waiting in silence for Gregg to make his escape, Katherine said, on an impulse, the wisdom of which may be regarded as doubtful, "About what you said of your career — I don't like to hear you speak so — so lightly of it. I think you have been very brave and splendid. Not many men would have held out as you have."

He was taken off his guard. "I didn't expect you to think so!"

"My — my notions of values and things have changed a good deal, I find. And I — may I go on?" She looked at Gregg; he was still in Mrs.

Deland's clutches. "I was a very selfish, thoughtless girl — then. I deliberately — no, carelessly, which is worse — jeopardized your happiness in the search for my own. I have been heartily ashamed of it. I — I hope it did not mean serious unhappiness to you."

He looked at her steadily. "I have not been unhappy." Then he rose to greet Gregg, who had extricated himself.

The latter was very cordial. He deeply regretted that John could not join them at luncheon and hoped that the renewed acquaintance would not be discontinued. "Any time you're in town, call me up and we'll lunch at the club. Any time, remember!"

But he did not miss Katherine's tone as she said to John, "Good-by! And I am very glad of what you have just told me."

Later, when they were at their table and the waiter — the same who had ministered to John, but ah! how different his mien! — had brought his cocktail, Gregg remarked, "I like that man Dunmeade. He's the kind I'd be glad to do a favor for, on general principles."

"I should think," she said, "he is the kind any man would be glad to do a favor for. Then, why is he so unsuccessful?"

"O, that's simple — he's so far ahead of his time. That's a much greater mistake than to be behind. He is an unusual man. And do you know," Gregg sipped his cocktail leisurely, "I have a notion he is the reason you have kept me waiting so long."

Under his gaze the tinge of color in her cheeks deepened. She made no reply.

"Does it ever occur to you," he asked, carefully

setting down the glass, "that I might get tired of waiting?"

"Does it ever occur to you," she answered, "that I shouldn't care very much?"

But of this John could know nothing.

That was the picture the dancing flames painted for him — Katherine in the glory of her full-blown womanhood. He wished he had not met her. It was true, he had not been painfully unhappy. But he saw no profit in reopening old wounds.

The wish was repeated many times, as the winter sped by and the vision persisted undimmed.

CHAPTER XVII

THE FORK OF THE ROAD

THE ceremony of exchanging ministers was not an elaborate court function. Fifty-odd gentlemen, representing each his principality, met in a hotel parlor and elected Mark Sherrod to succeed William Murchell as chairman of the Republican state executive committee. As the latter retired from the chair which, symbol of his undisputed sway, he had occupied for twenty years, and his enemy took his place, there was nothing to indicate that the seals of dominion had been formally transferred. The monarch was not present in person.

Many of the committeemen were surprised at Murchell's presence. They had thought that he would stay away to escape the last humiliation of beholding the formal ratification of his accomplished defeat. But he was there and presided, grimly defiant, over the deliberations until his successor was chosen and took up the seals. Then he remained, an apparently unmoved spectator of the proceedings, until the meeting was adjourned. Afterward, first shaking hands warmly with those who had supported him, far gloomier than he in his defeat, he went away alone.

He had gone to the meeting in a carriage because the weather was rough and his physical condition was not good. But when he left he forgot the car-

riage and started to walk to the house that he called home. He walked aimlessly, head lowered as though he were pondering some deep problem. But he was not thinking profoundly. He was feeling — feeling the weight of his years; they had never until recently seemed heavy. The defiant front that he had maintained before the committee had been a pose. Not that he felt defeat as stingingly as others might have supposed; rather, it had seemed to him a relief. He was merely feeling old — old!

His course took him past a house of state, where the monarch sat enthroned amid his court, directing the affairs of his kingdom. What Murchell saw was the office building of the Atlantic Railroad. He passed on, then paused suddenly, his face lighting up with a kind of humor. He would go back and enter, boldly and openly as he had never before dared to go, into the royal presence. He retraced his steps, entered an elevator and was rapidly hoisted to the proper story. A page of ebony skin took his card.

Murchell did not have to wait long. Soon he was before his former liege.

"How are you, Senator?"

"How're you, Sackett?"

Their hands met, to part instantly. Murchell took the chair indicated by the royal gesture.

The royal brow wrinkled. "Isn't this a little indiscreet — considering the present state of public sentiment?"

"What difference does it make — now? I've just come from the committee meeting."

"Yes?" Sackett understood. "Sherrod's elected, I suppose?"

"Yes. Thanks to your influence."

"I'm sorry." Sackett's regret was genuine. Monarchs are always sorry to have to change ministers. It is expensive. And deposed ministers are apt to hold resentment. "But I have my duty —"

"To your stock-holders, of whom I am one. Yes, I know. I'm not complaining," Murchell interrupted mildly. "Do you think I came to bark at you for not playing fair, Sackett?"

"Then what did you come for?" Sackett pulled out his watch and looked at it significantly, a hint that two years before he would have hesitated to give. Murchell did not seem to observe the action.

"I came to tell you to keep an eye on the Michigan. I've kept them out of the Steel City for you so far. But they're coming in. They ought to get in, too. At any rate, they're getting ready to spend a million in the attempt. I don't believe Sherrod can keep them out. Keep an eye on him, Sackett."

"We're counting on you to help there."

Murchell shook his head. "I'm through."

"Look here! What's the use of your getting your back up over this business? You understand perfectly well that we must stand in with whoever's on top. You put Sherrod out and we'll back you as strong as ever. I wish," Sackett said persuasively, "you'd keep an oversight of the Michigan matter. I doubt myself that Sherrod can keep them out."

"Little late thinking that, aren't you? He can't. Don't trust him to do it. Sherrod won't last, Sackett.

He has no self-control. He's too greedy. But I'm through. I don't want to put him out."

"We'll make it worth your while, if that's the trouble."

"You can't make it worth my while."

"You politicians," Sackett exclaimed angrily, "make me tired, with your infernal bickerings and jealousies. I'd as soon be back in the old days —"

"No, you wouldn't," Murchell interrupted again dryly. "You wouldn't go back to those days for many times the millions it'll cost you to keep the Michigan out — if you keep it out. You know that — I know it. You railroaders have grown hog-fat the last few years, just because in every state of the union there's been a man like me, willing to prostitute himself in your service."

Sackett looked a real astonishment — and suspicion.

"You needn't be afraid," Murchell grimly answered the suspicion. "It's too late for the leopard to change his spots. I'm not going to fight you. I'm going to quit."

He slouched back in his chair, half closing his eyes as though he were very tired. He sat for several minutes without speaking, forgetting that Sackett's time was precious. Sackett, too, seemed to have forgotten this important fact. He was wrinkling his brow over the problem, what means to devise to induce an old, pigheaded, betrayed minister to remain in the service in a minor capacity. He was too shrewd to argue; for many years he had had intimate knowledge of Murchell's inflexibility. In his perplexity he drew out a cigar, lighted it, took a

few whiffs, absently tossed it into the polished brass cuspidor and, as absently, produced a second; and Sackett's hobby, as any railroad man of the period will tell you, was economy.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he began at last. "I'll see Sherrod and —"

Senator Murchell looked up sharply, as though he had forgotten the other's presence. "Eh? Still trying to play both ends against the middle, Sackett?" He shook his head and rose; it seemed to be an effort. "I'm through. I've earned a rest, and my health's gone back on me. I'm going back to the farm to raise potatoes — the farmer vote crop has petered out.— And if I ever do come back into politics, I'll make my own terms."

He nodded a careless good-by and went slowly out of the office. Apparently he had forgotten to shake hands. Sackett did not remind him of the omission. He remained with the impression of having beheld a broken, hence harmless, old man.

It was characteristic of Murchell to give the world no inkling of his illness. He granted one interview in which his part consisted of a curt, "I am out of politics?" and thereafter refused to be seen. He was supposed to be sulking over his defeat. In the hostile press appeared triumphant and quasi-posthumous summaries of his deeds creditable and discreditable, chiefly the latter; to these, it was implied, *finis* had been written. Not until after the fact did the surgeons, unable to refuse the opportunity for self-advertisement, announce that a critical operation had been performed from which there were hopes of a partial recovery. Interest in his condition persisted;

extraordinarily, considering that he was out of politics. Meager accounts, drawn largely from baffled reporters' fancy, sketched him as a spiritless, feeble old man. The sentimental were inclined to believe that his heart was broken by his defeat.

When his convalescence permitted it, he was removed to New Chelsea. That community, as you may believe, was properly excited, intrusively interested and somewhat apprehensive lest he pass unseasonably into the beyond and rob it of the distinction of being his "legal residence." To have lost the prestige of being capital *de facto* was bad enough. John Dunmeade, as a collaborator in this disaster, was made to feel a sudden atmospheric frigidity and was led into further sorrowful reflections on the fickleness of the public. The mystery, only partially solved by his sickness, of the grim old warrior whose most spirited fights had always been made in the face of defeat, now passively yielding to his foes, continued unreasonably to vex the public. But Murchell, in very ungracious fashion, kept himself secluded from his neighbors and the stream of pilgrims that knocked at his gates.

These pilgrims were of three classes: those who had not wandered away after new gods; those who had followed the new to find them unprofitable idols and to return; and those who, clinging to the new, sought through dissimulation to test the potency of the old. Their plaints were divers; Sherrod was too arbitrary, he was too lax, he permitted himself and his friends to shake the plum trees of the cities so vigorously as to court failure of the crop, he greedily refused to divide the plums. From which it will

appear that Sherrod, even thus early in his ministry, showed an incomplete mastery of the subtle science of suiting the word to the man. Murchell was urged to intervene, to resist, to destroy. For one and all he had only the irritable reiteration, "I am out of politics." The dissimulants joyously, and the complainants despairingly, almost came to believe that he meant it. But the pilgrimages continued.

In the midst of this uncertainty the Michigan Railroad began secretly to undermine the Steel City, that hitherto impregnable fortress of the rival monarch. And John Dunmeade's announcement was made that, whether renominated as district attorney or not, he would be a candidate, anti-Sherrod and anti-Murchell, for the gubernatorial nomination. Jerry Brent was already well into a campaign for the Democratic nomination, theretofore regarded as an empty honor.

We may not go so far as to declare that Miss Roberta turned the course of history. But it is certain that she was first to foresee, though not with her bones, the fork of the road. Miss Roberta had scornfully refused to gratify her curiosity by asking questions, but to her had come tales of a doddering old creature living alone — yet without scandal — with a uniformed nurse and two servants. So touching were the pictures presented that at length, after a protracted struggle with herself, her heart relented. She filled a basket with the following comestibles: one dozen glasses of her own crabapple jelly, two jars of chicken gumbo made after a recipe which she alone knew, and a perfectly innocuous pudding designed to tempt the appetite of the most jaded invalid. This basket on her arm, she set out, on a day

when the March wind blustered and stung her face, toward Murchell's home.

She presented herself, stiffly upright as a grenadier, to the black-skinned man-servant.

"I've brought some things for Senator Murchell," she announced.

"Yes, ma'am. Ah'll give 'em to 'im." He made as though to relieve her of her burden.

"I'll give them to him myself."

"Yes, ma'am, but the senatoh he ain' 'lowed —"

"Tell him," she commanded, "that Miss Dunmeade wishes to see him."

He obeyed. Almost immediately he returned with a summons to the library. She followed him, refusing to relinquish her burden. She found Murchell reading before the open fire, his cheeks slightly pale and sunken, but his eyes clear and bright. He rose, with an ease that did not betoken approaching dissolution, to relieve her of the basket, shaking hands warmly.

"I'm very glad to see you, Roberta. Take a chair."

She seated herself primly. "You don't look as bad as they say." She observed him suspiciously.

"I'm as well as can be expected, I suppose."

Suspicion deepened. "What are you reading?"

"*Marcus Aurelius.*"

"Then you can't be very sick!"

"Roberta," he said lugubriously, "the doctors tell me that even with the best of care, I can live only a few years, and that's thanks to my good constitution."

"A few years!" she sniffed. "What did you expect, at your time of life?"

"Eh! But I suppose," he sighed, "I needn't expect much sympathy from you."

"A nice time it is," she responded tartly, "for you to be asking sympathy! You who never in your life had any for anybody else."

He thought it wise to change the subject, and hurriedly leaned over, raised the napkin and peered into the basket.

"Why! Did you bring all these for me, Roberta? That was very thoughtful of you."

"I guess you don't need them."

"O, yes, I do. My cook isn't very competent." He inwardly prayed that the slandered lady was not within hearing. "And I can't eat everything yet."

"I think," she said sharply, "you're just malingering. Pretending to be sick to get people's sympathy because you've been beaten."

"Now, Roberta," he protested mildly, "haven't I a right to rest up after sixty-five years of hard work?"

"No man has the right to rest, so long as he's able-bodied. And you're that."

He smiled, not in amusement at her asperity. "It's like you to cover up a kind act with sharp words. Your bark's worse than your bite, Roberta. But you would have led a man a life!" He shook his head humorously. "What an escape the men had that you wouldn't marry!"

"There weren't any to escape."

"Yes, there were. I remember that. You were

what they call a beauty, weren't you? Why," he asked in sudden curiosity, "didn't you marry some one of them?"

"Because," she said simply, "you were too busy being in love with Anne Dunmeade to notice me."

"Eh! I — why, Roberta —!" He stared at her blankly. Then his manner quickly softened. To him, as she sat there before him, primly upright, hands folded passively in her lap, there came a sense of something pathetic, almost tragic. He had an uncomfortable feeling of responsibility.

She perceived his change of manner and drew herself up even more stiffly, if that were possible. Her lips straightened in a severe, thin line.

"You needn't be sorry for me. I have been glad I escaped, ever since I found out the kind of man you were."

"I am — surprised," he said weakly. "I never supposed you looked at me. Do you know," he added slowly, "I have a notion I missed a good deal by not knowing."

"I'd have made a man out of you."

"I guess," he smiled grimly, "you'd have found it a hard job, as you seem to measure men. But I guess you could have, if any one could."

She turned on him in a little unexpected gust of fierceness. "But not the kind of man you are! Not a coward to quit fighting the very first time you are beaten. I thought you were one when you left your regiment before Gettysburg, but I excused you on the plea that we needed men at home, too. But now —" Her unfinished sentence was eloquent.

His astonishment was genuine. "Eh! I believed

"Why didn't you marry some one of them?"

you thought me a bad man. You ought to be glad I was beaten."

"But John says you're a better man than Sherrod."

"Only," Murchell amended, shrewdly guessing, "he put it that Sherrod is a worse man than I am, didn't he? I don't believe I'm a coward. A few months ago I did intend to quit — I was very tired and my sickness was coming on. But now — Roberta, can you keep a secret?"

"I've kept one for forty years."

"So you have! Well, the other day I got my doctor to tell me the things I must eat and must not eat to keep alive as long as possible — and then told him to go to the devil. Roberta, it was the first time I've sworn since I joined the church."

Miss Roberta kept her smiles for rare occasions. "I wish I could have heard you!" Which concession she immediately negatived by adding, "I suppose you're going to do the same kind of thing over again."

"Roberta, you're the most consistently inconsistent person in the world. You mean, am I going to turn reformer? You can't teach an old dog new tricks."

"Not if he doesn't want to learn, I expect."

She rose to go. He followed her example, though urging her to remain. She went a few steps toward the door, then suddenly turned and walked back to face him.

"Why don't you help John?"

It was his turn to stiffen, angrily. "You ask that, after the way he attacked me and created a sentiment against me that paved the way for Sherrod to beat me? He's responsible for Sherrod's getting on top,

do you know that? I gave him a chance five years ago and he wouldn't take it. I will do nothing for him.

"And besides," he added, more mildly, "he wouldn't let me help him in the only way I could."

She looked at him strangely for a moment. He would have said, had not the notion been so incredibly absurd, that there was pity in her eyes. She spoke with unusual quietness for her. "I wasn't thinking of him. He doesn't need you. You need him."

Again his astonishment was genuine.

She turned and went to the door, on her way taking up the basket. Recovering himself, he hastened after her.

"Aren't you going to leave the basket, Roberta?"

"I am going to take it," she flung back as she passed out of the room, "to a sick man who needs it — and deserves it. And I can find the door myself, Will Murchell."

He did not accompany her farther. He went to a window where he could watch her, still stiffly upright as a grenadier, breasting the March gale. He tried to recall how she had appeared when she was young; for she, too, all unknown to him, must have marked a phase in the life of the young man who once had been. When she had passed out of sight, he returned to his chair.

Marcus Aurelius was forgotten.

One of the pilgrims we have met before, casually, during the course of this chronicle, the Honorable G. Washington Jenkins. He had been of the faithful at a time when heresy was profitable. Hence his

tall, Lincoln-like figure was one of the few that were not turned inhospitably away from Murchell's door.

He was in New Chelsea a few days after Miss Roberta's neighborly errand, having had to return from Washington in connection with the Plumville post-office. He had "run over," as he explained to Editor Harvey, "to inquire after the health of Senator Murchell."

The inquiries made, he consumed a whole hour expatiating on the necessity of recapturing a lost leadership. Murchell listened with few interruptions. Then:

"Wash," he asked abruptly, "how'd you like to be a candidate for governor?"

"I'd like it," said Wash honestly.

"Suppose," Murchell suggested, "you begin a campaign for delegates. We could use the delegates, even if we couldn't use you," he added thoughtfully.

The congressman smiled faintly. They discussed the matter at length.

As Jenkins was leaving, his host remarked earnestly, "Hereafter consult only with Greene. Don't come here. I'm out of politics."

Neither gentleman smiled.

When the Honorable Jenkins returned to Washington, he reluctantly admitted to an interrogative reporter, "No, I'm afraid the senator is in a bad way. I don't think he'll ever go back into politics."

CHAPTER XVIII

HISTORY

THE tablets of history are scrawled with the names of many gentlemen who are supposed to have made it. Probably they had something to do with it. Yet how incomplete and haphazard the record, how many names, significant if we but knew their relation, are lacking! Let us here raise a tablet upon which shall be inscribed: "To those who, having had a finger in the historical pie-making, modestly refused or were unhappily unable to record their names and performances on its register."

There was, for example, John Heath. Of him you have never heard. Unhonored and unsung until this hour, he has remained in that shadowy obscurity for which he was designed. And no man ever saw him. He was, like chaos before it became a cosmos, without form and void. And yet, in a crisis when history was in the making, at the very psychological moment as you may say, he put forth his unsubstantial hand and — But let that appear in due course.

It was at a crucial time for those whom this chronicle concerns, when Jerry Brent and John Dunmeade were marching from Dan to Beersheba and back, and laboring, with a patience worthy of larger results, to rally the slender hosts of reform; when Stephen Hampden was risking his all in one wild throw for

vast fortune and Warren Blake was following that daring example; when the Consolidated Coal Company was making many happy by declaring a dividend of seven per cent.

In the kingdom things were awry. Among the subjects, whose interest in kingly affairs after two years of slumbering was due to awake, a murmur — not a cry of protest nor even a whisper, but a barely audible murmur — was to be heard; a rousing yawn, a rubbing of eyes. The rival monarch was thundering at the gates. Worse still, there was disaffection in the very source of dominion, in the army. A time truly when the master strategy of a Richelieu or the feline hand of a Mazarin, at the very least the resolution and diplomacy of a Wolsey, were required. And the minister in power chose this hour — to get drunk! Anxious glances were being cast toward the deposed minister in his self-exacted exile. Royal messengers were being sent galloping post-haste to him to urge him, with fine, unconscious irony, for the sake of past favor to speak the word that would restore concord among the mutinous regiments. But the ominous silence continued unbroken.

At such a juncture, we say, John Heath stepped in to deflect the course of history.

Came to the exile, not many days after Miss Roberta had come and departed with her basket, a messenger not under royal seal. Secretary, we may call him, to the new minister, having curried favor by desertion of the old. He was visibly perturbed and would not desist from his importunities until admitted to the presence of the exile. Even then, such was his feverish haste, he did not notice in his host, as Miss

Roberta had done, a vigor inconsistent with certain rumors rife.

He plunged at once into the matter in hand.

"Come," he besought, "to the capital."

"I will not," was the answer. "What's wrong?"

"I don't know," sighed the messenger. "Something's wrong."

"Draw a chair to the fire," ordered the exile, "and cool off."

This extraordinary command the messenger did his best to obey.

"Take a cigar — on the table behind you," Murchell continued.

This also the messenger did, puffing rapidly until Murchell, to see him, had to pierce a thick blue nimbus.

"Now then," was the next command, "imitate a sane man as far as possible, and tell me what you want."

"We've got Sherrod locked up in a room at the hotel. He's drunk as a lord and threatens to throw himself into the river!"

"Well — let him!" said Murchell, grimly heartless.

"But there'll be scandal. There's something wrong."

"Then let there be scandal."

"But," cried the messenger, "it may be something to bring on a revolution that will sweep us all — Sherrod, Parrott, me — you — off the face of the earth."

"I," responded Murchell calmly, "am out of politics, and don't care. What do you want me to do?"

"Come with me to the capital, find what's wrong and straighten it out."

"Is that all? Why come to me? Why don't you do it yourself? Go to Parrott."

"There's nobody else to go to. I can't. Parrott's a fourflusher. This is critical."

"I won't do it. It's trouble of your own making. Get yourselves out of it."

The messenger sprang to his feet and began to pace the floor swiftly. He assumed to instruct a master. With wild gesticulation and passionate phrase he sketched the impending calamity. The times were ripe for a revolution. These unutterable fools, Dunmeade and Brent, with their incessant clack about bosses and graft were getting the people stirred up. There was trouble in the air — he, the speaker, could feel it. The organization was falling to pieces. That magnificent army, monument to the incomparable genius of Murchell, faced total destruction. Murchell's old friends, who had stood by him so faithfully during all his victorious career — and had fled only before the approach of defeat — would be swept from power and into a profitless obscurity. The messenger implored the exile to "come over and help us."

Murchell listened, unemotional as the chair in which he sat, until the despairing appeal came to a period.

"Do you think," he inquired calmly, "Sherrod's short in his accounts?"

"I don't know. There are books I can't see without exciting suspicion. And I can get nothing out of him."

The swift pacing ceased abruptly. The messenger confronted Murchell.

"Who," he demanded, "is John Heath?"

"I don't know," answered Murchell truthfully.

"Within less than two years he has received from the state more'n nine hundred thousand dollars — for special services!"

"Nine hundred thousand dollars! What is John Heath?"

"I don't know. But I think he may be — hell."

The messenger flopped into his chair, helping himself, uninvited, to another cigar. Murchell, as though taking up a task that the other had left unfinished, rose and in his turn began to pace the floor; not excitedly, but leisurely, hands thrust into trousers' pockets, and without words. The guest watched him anxiously. But neither smile of triumph nor frown of perplexity ruffled the contemplative calm of the old man's face.

Only once did the guest interrupt. "A train leaves in half an hour, Senator."

Murchell ignored the interruption and continued his pacing. After a few minutes he went out of the room, still without speaking. He did not reappear for almost a quarter of an hour. But then he wore a hat and an overcoat and was carrying a light leather grip.

"Come along," he commanded. "The hack's waiting."

The guest went along with alacrity.

He would have given much to know what was going on in Murchell's brain, what hopes and plans were being born. But it was not his to know. Dur-

ing the ride to the Steel City Murchell talked principally of a severe snowstorm that had visited New Chelsea during the winter.

Once his companion interrupted to say, suggestively, "Senator, this matter might change things considerably, eh?"

"It isn't ended yet," Murchell remarked dryly.

"But when it's over —? You know, I hope, you can count on me — for anything, Senator." There was a question in his statement.

Murchell shook his head in curt finality. "I want nothing. I am out of politics."

When they had reached the Steel City and had changed cars for the capital train, he went to their stateroom and was soon, to all outward appearances, sound asleep. The messenger regretted that this opportunity for a confidential chat should be wasted.

At that mystic hour which we are told is the darkest of all, two men were sitting in a hotel room. One sat stretched out before the dying fire, yawning wistfully for the sleep of which twenty-four hours' guard duty had robbed him. A litter of newspapers on the floor around him showed how he had beguiled the slow vigil. The other was slouched in a rocker by the table, head dropped forward on his breast and hands hanging inertly at his sides. His face, past the flush of mere intoxication, was a livid white; deep rings were under his eyes, and his stupidly parted lips were purple; the red-rimmed eyelids were half closed. Drunk evidently, and more than that; the wonder was, when one saw the number of empty bottles on the table, that a man could consume as much whisky as he apparently had swallowed and still live. Oc-

casionally his lips moved; senseless mutterings came from them.

The sober one rose, stretched himself wearily and, taking up the coal-scuttle, replenished the fire.

At the noise the other stirred, straightened up with an effort. The half-closed lids opened, revealing the glassy, bloodshot orbs, in one of which was the sinister cast.

"Wha'zhay?" he muttered thickly. He made a futile attempt to rise. "Wakinzh, I'm go'n out. Go'n — throw m'zhelf over — over brizh."

"Shut up, you fool!" Only Watkins defined the kind of fool more specifically. "Here, take another drink."

From a half-emptied bottle he poured out a glass of liquor and held it to the other's lips. Sherrod drank it obediently and sank back into his former limp attitude. Watkins returned to his seat before the fire.

A few minutes later he heard steps along the hall and a guarded knock at the door. He opened a cautious crack, peeped out, and then threw it open eagerly. Murchell and the messenger entered. Watkins seized Murchell's hand joyfully.

"Thank the Lord!" he exclaimed. "I couldn't have stood it much longer."

"How is he?" the messenger asked, nodding toward Sherrod.

"I've kept him drunk — only way I could keep him quiet. The hotel people think it's just one of his periodicals."

Sherrod seemed to hear their voices. He opened his eyes again and stared at the new-comers glassily.

Then a lightning flash of intelligence seemed to penetrate his stupor.

"Murchell!"

He managed to stagger to his feet, stumbling toward Murchell with hands outstretched as though obedient to some primal instinct to throw himself at the feet of the man who could save him. Then a last wave of drunkenness swept over him. He fell, sprawling unconscious on the floor.

The three men looked disgustedly down on the thing before them. Watkins nudged it roughly with his foot.

"Hog!" he sneered in disrespect he would not have dared to show to Sherrod sober. "He ought to be kicked."

"He ought," said Murchell, more practical, "to have a Turkish bath. Is there one open at this time of night?"

"In the hotel. They keep it open," Watkins grinned, "for all-night statesmen."

"Then take him there."

Ten hours later Sherrod opened his eyes. After a struggle with a soggy, unresponsive brain he won a vague recollection of a long nightmarish period in which a Thing scorched and seared his soul, a blank in which it vanished, and of being roasted and steamed and pounded back into a hazy semblance of consciousness. He was too old for his body to recover quickly, even with efficient help, from the effects of the outrage he had put upon it, as the throbbing head and violent nausea eloquently proclaimed. He closed his eyes and lay very still, sending memory on a long, wandering

search after the Thing which had driven him to this indiscretion. Then suddenly came — recollection.

He started up with a groan — and beheld the man who sat by the window. The man — Murchell — heard the movement and came to the bedside. He stood looking down pitilessly at the half-recumbent sick man. Sherrod stared back with bewildered, fearful eyes for a moment. Then, with another groan, he fell back. His parched lips tried to frame a question, but nothing came of the effort save a dry, croaking sound.

Then Murchell spoke. "Who," he demanded, "is John Heath?"

A spasm of fear even more acute contracted Sherrod's face. He could not take his eyes from Murchell's, which held him as if in a physical grip and seemed to be drawing the secret out of him. He moistened his lips with his tongue.

"Wh — what do you — know?"

"Who," Murchell repeated, still in the pitiless tone, "who is John Heath?"

"He is — the political account."

"Of which you're the receiving end?"

Sherrod's lips formed a soundless, "Yes."

"How much are you short?"

There was a moment's pause, of inward struggle, it seemed. "All the account."

"Nine hundred thousand dollars?"

"About that."

"What have you got to show for it?"

"Some securities — oil stocks."

"Worth what?"

"Three hundred thousand — about. I don't know — exactly."

"Where are they?"

"In my private safe at the office."

Murchell turned sharply and left the room. Almost at once he was back, accompanied by Watkins. "Give Watkins the combination," he commanded.

There was another moment of hesitation, of inward struggle. Sherrod's soul seethed with hate of the merciless man who glared so icily down upon him; he felt angrily that a shameful advantage was being taken of his weakness to wring from him what in strength he could have withheld. But a great fear was upon him, swallowing up even hate and anger. He mumbled the combination.

"Have you got that, Watkins? Then you and Paine fetch here all the securities in the safe. Everything you can find. Be quick."

Watkins obeyed, as promptly and unquestioningly as the soldier on the field of battle obeys his superior officer. As he went he found time to wonder how the impression had ever got abroad that this man of instant decision, of crisp orders, was a useless victim of the decrepitude of age.

Murchell remained looking silently down at the man on the bed. Sherrod tried to glare back defiantly, but the fear that was upon him would speak. He reached up and clutched Murchell by the arm.

"Wh — what," he quavered, "are you going to do?"

Murchell shook his arm free. "I am going to get you out of the muddle you have got yourself into,

you —" He left the sentence uncompleted, as though he could think of no adequate epithet.

Sherrod gaped foolishly, trying to comprehend the incomprehensible — that the man above him, who least of all the world owed him service, would lift him over the *impasse* around which no way appeared. Then suddenly he broke into tears and maudlin babblings — explanations, contrition, gratitude, promises mingling disconnectedly. He longed, he declared, to prove his gratitude, he would give his life to repay him who would do this mercy.

Murchell listened in cold contempt. "You don't mean a word you say," he interrupted the flow at last. "You're only a coward frightened out of his wits. You'll be the same treacherous hound when it's over.— I'm not doing it for you."

"Then why are you doing it? And how?" Sherrod's fear rushed back upon him.

"Never mind why," was the curt answer. "I'll tell you how when it's done."

He turned and went out of the room, not to return until Watkins and Paine, the messenger, arrived with the securities.

An afternoon train, rolling down out of the hills into the flat lands, bore William Murchell to the city that had witnessed the last step in his overthrow. A cab took him, by appointment, to the home of Philip Wilder, where he lay overnight. Philip Wilder was not a monarch, to be sure, but he was a prince of the blood and he ruled over a province of street railways. Many things did this princely gentleman desire and

for them he was willing to pay — the least price that must be paid.

He, like Miss Roberta and Watkins, was astounded when he beheld, not a shuffling, harmless shadow, but a man who showed the marks of age's battering, yet was clear-minded, hale and hearty, who had not forgotten how to drive a close bargain, who knew exactly what he wanted and who — got it. So pleased was he by his discovery that the next morning, breaking a solemn promise to Murchell, he reported it to Sackett. "Richard," he declared, "is himself again."

But by that time Murchell was well on his way back to the capital.

A rumor that the once great politician was on the train quickly spread among the passengers and many of them found occasion to stroll past his seat. But there was no visible ripple of emotion to betray to their curious eyes the swelling sense of triumph within him.

When, his energy sapped up by the sickness, the seriousness of which he did not yet realize, he had confronted Sackett and declared his purpose to quit, he had spoken in all truth. But, the operation over and strength creeping back into the body whose tissues austere living had never devitalized, the hunger, the need for action reasserted itself. The relief, the doctors had said, could be but temporary, they commanded abstinence from work and worry. But in his heart he knew better; he knew that for him, to whom action — the same "work and worry" which so burdened other men — had been the very bread of life, to dawdle along to the grave meant a speedier decay. The spirit

that had grown strong and arrogant on the battle-field would, bereft of the joy of struggle, quickly break.

Hence he planned, not consciously to reseek his old power and responsibility, but from his castle in the forest to make sudden, unexpected forays to harass those who had deprived him of his glory. Then, even while he thus planned a guerilla warfare, came the opportunity to wreak the sweetest of all revenges, to save those who had thrown him over, to torture his enemy with the sense of inferiority and obligation, perhaps — the warrior soul leaped — to make of revenge also a lever to open the gates in the road back to supremacy. Almost for the first time in his life, he acted on an impulse. Yet his action was not wholly unconsidered. During the few minutes in which he listened to and pondered the Macedonian cry, he thought much — more of what he would do than of why.

And now it was done — it was done! Under the stimulus of sharp, successful action he felt almost the strength of his prime. He looked out of the window on flying meadow and plowed land, and saw them not. He was beholding a vision on which, with savage contempt, he had looked, and over which, with yet more savage joy, he would gloat — the quivering, fear-shot countenance of his enemy. Whirring wheel struck from rail an iron song of triumph in which his soul joined — the mad, exultant shout of the viking returning victorious.

But he found, what Murchell with his experience of men ought to have known he would find, a different Sherrod from that he had left,— a Sherrod who had had time to think, to measure the situation, who had

recovered his nerve. And of Sherrod this may be written: he was a great fighter. Cunning and daring, he knew how to strike and where, and strike he generally did with a brilliancy of execution no other politician of his day shared. Conscienceless, disloyal — yes — but even his treacheries were accomplished with a certain reckless grace and decision that gave them the seeming of the born master's instinctive strategy. One got the impression from him of a man to whom all things were unmoral, in whom ethical sense was naturally lacking. And he had what Murchell had not, a personal magnetism that often won faith even where interest failed; though he lacked what made Murchell great, inflexibility and self-control. Coward he was not. Almost any man, beaten by the same knowledge of crime and imminent discovery, with so much to lose, would have suffered a lapse from courage. But the hour of cringing and weakness was past. He was ready, every faculty alert, to fight to keep what he had won. And he was that most bitter of men, a proud, passionate soul upon whom had been put the shame of having his enemy behold his shame.

Murchell found him in the same hotel room, through the open windows of which a biting wind had swept the last trace of the fetid fumes of tobacco and whisky. He was sitting, wrapped in an overcoat, by the table, slowly sipping from a glass of iced sour lemonade. White he was still, with deep rings under his eyes. But only the compressed lips and the barely perceptible tremor of the hand that set down the glass denoted anxiety. Murchell carefully closed and locked the door and, without speaking, sat down across the table

from him. Sherrod's eyes, cool, not defiant but aggressive, menacing almost, locked with Murchell's steady ones.

There was a moment of silence, during which Sherrod caught on the other's face a glimmer of astonishment. He knew the reason and he braced himself the more tensely.

"Well?" The voice was cool.

"I went to Wilder," said Murchell, almost in a whisper. "He is selling your securities to-day at the market. He will lend you the balance. To-morrow a man will come with the cash."

"And in return?" Sherrod knew the prince.

"He wants some charters in Adelphia and some traction legislation. He will explain in detail when you see him. I have promised him what he wants. You will see that he gets it."

"Yes. The balance — you say it is a loan. How am I to repay?"

"That is for you to say." Murchell paused, then added, "I understand banks are still paying for the privilege of state deposits."

"How much do Paine and Watkins know?"

"As much as I guessed."

"I can keep their mouths shut."

Again silence. Neither's eyes had wavered. Put a chessboard between them, and you would have said that they were two men intent upon their game, save that they looked so steadily at each other. Each was the chessman that the other would move. And each seemed determined to break the other's gaze, as though upon that hung the issue of some struggle in which they engaged.

The silence was broken first by Sherrod. His lips twisted in a faint sneer.

"Are you waiting for my gratitude? I have none. I'm sick still, but I'm not afraid, as I was yesterday. And I understand the situation. You haven't done this for me."

"Is there any reason why I should do it for you?"

Sherrod began to feel that he could no longer endure the other's contemptuous, relentless gaze, that in spite of his will his own was wavering. To cover it he made a convulsive movement with his arm that knocked over the glass. He looked away as he righted it. The discomfiture worked a sudden change in his manner. The coolness vanished. Hate, anger, boiled over in his heart, blazed out through his eyes as they returned to Murchell's. He almost hissed out his words.

"You came here expecting to gloat over me, didn't you? You think, because you've caught me with the goods on, you're a superior being. You needn't. Everything I am, Bill Murchell, you are!"

Murchell permitted himself to smile. It added fuel to the rising flames.

"Don't try to come the pure and lofty over me! Everything I am, you are. Only worse — you whited sepulcher! You're an elder in the church, ain't you? I s'pose, when you were sick, you had the parson around to pray over you, didn't you?" (As a matter of fact, precisely that had happened.) "When you were praying, did you tell the parson how you got to be so rich?"

"At least," Murchell said quietly, "I didn't steal it from the treasury of the state."

Under the taunt Sherrod seemed to lose all hold on himself. He sprang to his feet. His face was convulsed, his voice and the pointing hand shook in a very hysteria of hate.

"You dare call me a thief! You! How about the market tips you got for your votes in the senate, the bribes you authorized to be given, the blackmail you levied for your influence in the legislature? Maybe you called them legal fees? You a lawyer! — when there isn't a business man in the country would trust you with a case. Yesterday you called me a treacherous dog — remember that? How did you get your seat in the senate, if it wasn't by treachery to the poor fool that made you and trusted you? You thought me a coward yesterday. I'm a braver man than you. You're the kind of coward that hides himself from himself under a cloak of sanctimonious hypocrisy and sophistry. I've heard your preacher's talk about institutions and larger good. You're not man enough to admit to yourself that you're like us all — on the make in any way you can get it." He stopped, glaring at Murchell, his breast heaving in the stress of his emotion.

Into Murchell's eyes had come a steely gleam that in a saner moment would have restored Sherrod to self-control, but now was unheeded. But his voice continued cold, cuttingly contemptuous.

"Well, are you convinced?"

"That you —"

"Don't talk so loud. That you're a better and stronger man than I am?"

"I'm convinced I know you, my friend. And I'm not afraid of you. Thought you'd come into this af-

fair and use the knowledge as a club to bully me out of politics with, didn't you? Well — swing your club. I'm not afraid. I know why you did it, not for me, but for yourself. You're trying to sneak back into the game after you've been thrown out and you know that this thing, if it came out, would kill your chances as well as mine. The state's all upset, thanks to your underhand work, and this would start a revolution that would wipe you — me — all our kind, off the map — would help nobody but that fool Dunmeade. And by helping me, you've made yourself an accessory. So then — crack your whip, if you dare!"

Murchell got slowly to his feet. Never once, from the moment he sat down, had his eyes left Sherrod's. In them now, lights came and went, like heat lightning on a summer horizon. In him, too, words were burning to be cried aloud; he had heard much truth that afternoon and it had stung into life something which in William Murchell had never stirred before. With an effort that rendered him momentarily voiceless and rigid he beat down the surging passion. Then he spoke, still in the cold, even voice that cut.

"Just why I have done this isn't important at present. I had a good many reasons — some, probably, that you aren't qualified to understand. And I'm not trying to sneak back into the game. I've never been out of it. As to whether I want or dare to swing my club, that remains to be seen. You'll have to chance it, Sherrod."

Sherrod laughed, a harsh, sneering cachinnation that must have carried into the adjoining room. "I'll chance it! You're not the kind of man in whose hands such knowledge is dangerous. And I know all about

your game — do you think I've been fooled by your pretense? I know all about Wash Jenkins' gumshoe campaign for delegates." He leaned over the table and thrust out an index finger that almost struck Murchell's face. "You tell Wash Jenkins from me to go straight to hell. I can be nominated governor even from behind the bars of the penitentiary!"

Murchell was fully master of himself once more. He calmly pushed the threatening hand away from his face. "That," he remarked, "would be a fitting residence for you. In the meantime, we'll put it out of your power to seek the nomination from that quarter."

He left the room abruptly, returning immediately with Watkins. He carefully closed the door behind them. Then he faced the two men.

"Watkins, it's fortunate that you're cashier in the treasurer's office."

Watkins agreed.

"Because from this minute *I* am state treasurer. Sherrod will be allowed to sign vouchers that I approve — that's all. You will report to me once a week in person. And not a voucher must be cashed until O. K.'d by me. You understand?"

Watkins looked at Sherrod, then back to Murchell. He nodded.

"Sherrod will do nothing to disturb this arrangement. If he tries — let me know. Good day!"

He went out of the room, quietly closing the door.

This is how John Heath, of whom you shall hear more anon, put his finger into the historical pie. Many will not believe it. But it happened, just as you have been told.

CHAPTER XIX

A DESERTED JORDAN

WAR! Which is all that General Sherman and Jeremy Applegate described it. And civil war, which is worse. The earth shaking under the feet of many armies. The populace flocking wonderingly about two great camps, between them a mighty breach that might never be healed. And O! the consternation in the royal palace when news came that the beleaguered stronghold had fallen, and all because, no one doubted, the Warwick who had fled from his castle of exile to take the field with the advancing Lancastrians had revealed the pregnable place in the city wall! The Michigan had won into the Steel City.

Two men were scrambling over each other, turning the state upside down, because each lusted for power and hated the other. Victory by either, if one might judge by the past, meant corruption, thievery, oppression, injustice, and it would be won by characteristic means. The people knew it.

Between the two camps wandered a lonely Voice, preaching honesty, decency, liberty, equity. He was worthy to preach. He was the sort of man to whom other men gladly entrust their most important private affairs. He was fitted by capacity, by study, by ideals, for the pure function of government. He had put aside preferment, money, love — the trio of rewards

for any one of which men daily sell their souls — that he might be the fitter for his task. He had labored diligently, with enthusiasm, then steadfastly, then doggedly, believing in his people with little to justify the faith that was in him. He had come into the full splendor of manhood, bearing up under a load of discouragement that would have staggered many strong men.

And as he went about that spring, preaching his crusade, scanty audiences listened carelessly or with suspicion — bred of many deceptions and systematic miseducation; let us be just — indifferently responsive. One who had reached that degree of discouragement where he had ceased to seek for encouraging signs might well have believed there was no response. He preached purity; they called him a futile dreamer. He preached honesty and common sense; they said he would "hurt business." And Quaker and German and Scotch-Irish all with one accord lovingly clutched their dollars, wagged their heads, shrugged their shoulders and veered to windward of him as though he were the plague. He saw the last vestige of youth slip profitless away. A stoop came into his shoulders that ought not to have come for many years, a sadness into his eyes. Worst of all, his faith began to waver, in his people, in himself, in his ideal.

He was in the Steel City one night, speaking at a public meeting. He was often laughed at for proffering old-fashioned oratory in the day of the ubiquitous newspaper. But it was the only way in which he could reach the people, since the columns of the subsidized press were not open to him or his crusade.

He went away from the hall, heavily downcast. The audience had been small, anything but enthusiastic, and he had spoken poorly. There is no discouragement like unto that of the man who believes he has a message to give and knows that he has delivered it inadequately.

His way to the hotel took him along the city's principal street. He walked slowly, scrutinizing the passers-by with that interest in city throngs which the country-bred man never quite loses. He came to a corner where another crowded thoroughfare crossed. He stopped and leaned against the wall of the bank that stood there. A score or more arc lights turned night into day. A hundred intermittent electric signs in all colors, advertising shoes, soap, dry goods, theaters, saloons — and what not? — cast over the scene a glamour as unreal as that of any stage.

The theaters were just letting out, and around him swirled a stream of humanity, the sound of many voices, and twice as many feet rising in a peculiar, unmusical roar. All sorts: top-hatted clubmen, drab shopkeepers, loudly-attired clerks, swaggering youths, slouching loafers whose intended intoxication was as yet only half accomplished; on their arms their wives, their sisters, their sweethearts, their harlots; and all in a hurry, hastening to crowd every minute of every hour full — to forget? He thought it might be so. For he knew that throughout the day these men all raced madly to win ahead of care; perhaps the multicolored night was the same mad rush to forget the gaunt mistress. He caught, as he always did, in their eyes a look one sees not in country people — a restless-

ness, a feverishness, an intensity, a — was it fear? He thought of something that Haig, who knew them, had once said.

"Gradual reform by an awakened people? By the time they're awakened, it'll be too late. It's too late now. Because why — the cities hold the balance of power. Do you know that in the cities nine hundred and ninety-nine are directly or indirectly dependent on the thousandth for their incomes? And do you know that there are six men who can bring on a panic on twenty-four hours' notice — not a toy panic such as we've had, but a man-size one that would paralyze every industry in every city of the nation? The same men through control of transportation can glut or starve the cities at will. If the people get cantankerous, all they need to do is to turn on a panic. A city man at best has no more sand than a bunny cotton-tail. Put on the screws, give him a taste of hunger, then promise him three meals a day if he'll fall in line, and he will fall in line or —" There Haig had stopped.

"Or violent revolution?"

"I hope so. But — have you ever been hungry?" Here Haig's voice had grown bitter. "I don't mean an edge to your appetite, but really hungry, with the ache in your belly, the dizziness in your head and the weakness crawling up your legs. I have. And I tell you, it makes a coward out of the strongest, a cringing cur, who'll beg or lick the foot that kicks him, for a crust."

"But they'd never dare put the screws on in that fashion!"

"Dare!" the pessimist had sneered. "What can

put the fear of God or man into the heart of a rich man?"

John wondered, as the endless stream of humanity swept by him, if that were true. What, if the screws were put on, would these men do — fight or submit?

But it was not that which made the load of despondency hang heavier. Once, seeing a thousand men gathered in the Square at home, he had thought of the power there, "the power and the glory." Now he saw the people, not in their immensity but in their infinite multiplicity: so many men with so many interests, each living in his own restricted sphere of linen-measuring, iron-making, cracker-selling, pen-pushing, money-changing, seeing only his own worldlet and its needs, able to brush elbows with his neighbor on the street without interest or sense of relation. Was Haig then right? How could a dreamer, or a thousand dreamers, by word of mouth teach these men to think what their lives taught them not to feel — that a social problem was their problem, that political putrefaction was their peril, that the masses' interest was their interest? In vain he recalled historical episodes when the people, for brief moments, had seemed to thrill with a sense of the oneness of humanity and its common need. He saw only, through the magnifying glass of many disappointments, their infinite multiplicity — the apparent hopelessness of stamping on their consciousness the sense of intimate relation and social responsibility without which substantial reform, genuine progress, were empty dreams.

He walked on, tortured by doubts, yet clinging, as the shipwrecked mariner clings to his raft, to his dwindling faith in the people.

As he was passing through the lobby of his hotel the clerk motioned him to the desk. "Say, there's been a big tough guy in three times to-night, asking for you. Says it's important and he'll be back again. Name is Maley. I guess," he laughed, knowing his guest, "it's some political bum wanting to make a touch."

Butch Maley, doubtless! John, curious, found a seat in the lobby and waited. He laughed inwardly, not pleasantly, at the recollections called forth by the name, which he had almost forgotten. Butch Maley, the first to be convicted in that crusade of nearly six years ago — it seemed like a generation — had been the first milestone in a path, the end of which the young crusader in his innocent optimism had thought he clearly saw. The path now seemed endless, tortuous and painful.

He had not long to wait. Maley was the same bestial creature who had demanded money at the rally, stood trembling in the dock and marched away, mouthing imprecations and large threats, to the penitentiary. Even prison life could not leave its imprint on his coarse fiber or further taint his spirit. He swaggered still, no peril confronting him. That he was prosperous, the yellow diamond in his necktie loudly proclaimed. He rolled toward John, grinning affably.

"Howdy, Johnny?" He did not offer to shake hands, for which John was thankful, although he was too tired in spirit to resent the familiarity of the greeting.

"How are you, Maley?"

"Me?" Maley drew up a chair and deposited his huge bulk in it. "O, I'm livin' on Number One, Easy

Street. These here is good times fer fellers like me." With an apparently unconscious gesture he lovingly stroked his paunch.

"So I should say. Same old profession?"

"I got a half intrust in a booze joint. That's my business. As fer profesh'— I'm still a statesman. Only yuh'd have a helluva time gittin' the goods on me now. I learnt," he grinned, "a lot from yuh."

"There seems to be a demand for your peculiar talents."

"They's alwuz a chanct fer the feller wot's out fer the coin an' ain't squeamish. Say," he leaned forward and placed a propitiatory hand on John's knee. "They ain't no hard feelin's, is they?"

"Not on my part."

"They ain't on mine, nuther, not now anyways. 'Cos," he chuckled coarsely, "I'm wantin' sump'n."

"What can I do for you?"

"'Tain't fer me." He assumed an air of extreme caution. "S'posin' they wuz a feller wot never done yuh no dirt, and at the same time, not bein' in yer game, yuh got him foul. An' then, s'posin' he beat it, not wantin' to serve time, an' then, bein' up against it in a pertickler way, he wanted to see yuh. Would yuh see him?"

"Slayton or Sheehan?"

"Sheehan."

"I guess I'd see him. Where is he?"

Maley winked solemnly. "I don't know nuthin' till I know yuh won't have him pinched. That's the point — will yuh have him pinched?"

John thought a moment before replying. "Well, I guess I wouldn't, so long as he stays out of my

jurisdiction. I couldn't make him more harmless now by having him arrested."

"Is this all on the level?" Maley looked at John as though suspicious of this prompt concession.

"It is."

"Then go in the little room back o' the bar, an' I'll have him with yuh in no time. He's waitin', not fur away."

Maley swaggered out of the lobby with a triumphant air as though he had accomplished some delicate diplomatic manœuver. John made his way into a stuffy little room behind the hotel bar. It contained a half dozen small tables, at two of which were noisy, half-drunken groups. John sat down at the table farthest away from them and waited.

Maley was as good as his word. In a few minutes he entered, leading the fugitive. There was an embarrassed moment as John rose to greet the man whom he had broken. He hesitated, hardly knowing how to address him. Sheehan's hand started forward in an uncertain gesture, then dropped back to his side. On a kindly impulse John held out his. The other caught it almost eagerly in a soft, damp clasp.

"I hope you are well, Sheehan."

"I look it, don't I?" The fugitive gave a half-hearted laugh.

John was obliged to confess to himself that he did not look it. If to Maley conviction and imprisonment had been merely an unfortunate accident not permitted to disturb the serene course of his destiny, Sheehan had not accepted calamity so philosophically. He had suffered, really suffered, John thought; he bore the marks. His cheeks, once so rubicund, were sallow

and pimply. Flabby pouches had gathered under his eyes, which were furtively restless, as though continually on the watch for some pursuer. He was fatter than ever. But whereas his stomach had formerly been of the graceful rotundity of semi-active prosperity, it had now become a paunch, like unto Maley's own. But it was the fat of unhealth, and as waist had protruded chest had fallen in. His hands shook slightly. The suffering must have come from within, since John had never tried very hard to have him traced and recaptured.

"Sit down," said Maley hospitably, "an' have a drink on me."

John sat down, but declined the drink. Sheehan and Maley ordered whisky. While they were waiting for it, there was another awkward moment, during which Maley developed a loquacious interest in the weather.

The whisky seemed to restore to Sheehan a part of his nerve. Without further preliminaries he blurted out, "I want to go back." He stopped, as though waiting for an answer.

John waved his hand and remarked, "The railroads are still running," a pleasantry that seemed lost on Sheehan.

"It's that cursed sentence that's troubling me."

"That's nuthin'," Maley interposed cheerfully. "It's only four months in the workhouse. I got a year in the pen." His tone might have led one to believe him boasting of a distinction.

"I should think," said John gravely, "you would find it almost a relief to have it served and over."

"So I would," answered Sheehan, with an emphatic

sincerity that was not to be doubted. "But I've got a family."

"A little late to think of them, isn't it? The sentence would have to be served."

"It wouldn't, if you said the word."

John shook his head. "Besides, I'll not be district attorney much longer and my successor mightn't be complaisant."

Sheehan leaned over the table and clutched John by the arm, his face twitching nervously. "I guess you think fellers like me haven't got any heart? Let me tell you something. I've got a wife and two kids that I think as much of as if I was an educated reformer. I haven't seen them in nearly five years, for fear you would trail me through them. But now they're in trouble. Money affairs are all balled up. And the wife's got to go under an operation — I don't know whether she'll pull through or not. I ought to be there to take care of them."

A doubtful blessing to them, John thought, studying the dissipation-marred countenance. Still he was not there to pass on Sheehan's value to his family. And he remembered having heard that in former days Sheehan had been very proud and fond of his wife and children and — eccentric virtue among his kind — faithful to them.

"I didn't think you'd let me off. You reformers," here was bitterness, "are always bent on sendin' somebody to jail. But will you do this — give me two or three months, until the wife gets out of the hospital and I've got things straightened out some? Then I'll take my medicine."

John thought rapidly. In the beginning of his cru-

sade he would have enforced the law rigorously and mercilessly, believing that in punishment lay healing virtue for the state. Now he had learned its futility. And the broken man in front of him had already been punished enough. Surely he could show so much leniency and harm no one.

"I'll do that much for you," he said. "Gladly."

Sheehan did not try to thank him. He leaned back in his chair, sighing as though from his shoulders a heavy load had fallen.

"And if you need any legal help," John continued kindly, "in straightening out your affairs, I'll be glad to help you."

Sheehan suddenly sat bolt upright, the red rushing to his sallow face. "It's that sanctimonious Blake," he said angrily. "He's gettin' after me because they think I'm afraid to come back. Dirty crook! The bank's tryin' to collect some old notes of mine that wasn't supposed to be paid."

"Not to be paid? Why?"

"Political notes. Look here!" Sheehan's face lighted up in a slow, cunning smile that boded no good for Warren Blake. "Do you want to make a big play?"

John, too, sat up, suddenly alert. "Just what do you mean?"

"Have you been percolatin' around in politics for six years an' not known about the Farmers'? There's always a few easy banks for the politicians. They get state deposits, see? An' then dish them out to the politicians on notes. Sometimes the notes are paid an' sometimes they're just carried along. My notes wasn't to be paid, because I helped get the Farmers'

its deposits. It used to be one of the easy banks. An' I guess it is still. Else why is a bank that's friendly to Murchell carryin' deposits under Sherrod? I guess they must be gettin' pretty shaky, because I ain't the only one they're after. I've been skirmishin' around here, seein' some men I used to know, an' they tell me Blake's pushin' a good many old notes hard."

"But Hampden and Blake, with their stock, wouldn't let —"

"Stock! I bet they haven't ten shares apiece. If you want to find that stock, you've got to look in the tin boxes of the farmers or in the estates of the widows an' orphans."

"But their last report was fine."

"That's easy. You just carry the notes as assets. Assets!"

"See here, Sheehan!" John was stern. "Have you anything but suspicion for this?"

"Ain't suspicion, the kind I've got, enough? You go after 'em an' show 'em up. I bet you'll find 'em rotten. Those easy banks always do bust up sooner or later. I s'pose I've got to pay. I've got property an', if they sue, I can't make any defense. But," he concluded vengefully, "somebody else has got to pay, too."

"Sheehan," John said coldly, rising, "you're letting your desire to get even get away with your common sense. I'll not destroy confidence in a bank, ruin it, by going after it on mere suspicion. As for yourself," he added, more kindly, "if you report at my office next Saturday morning with new bail, I'll go before the court and ask that execution of your sentence be postponed until your affairs are easier."

With that he left them.

He went up to his room on the top floor of the hotel. From the open window he could look down on the street, on which the ebbing tide of humanity had left its deposit of drunken men and late pleasure-seekers. But above the sound of their voices and shuffling feet, to him in his eyrie came the ceaseless, confused roar of the life and toil of the city, speaking its awesome immensity, its epic struggle and its infinite variety. Yet this was but a fraction of the complex, incomprehensibly vast organism which he, one infinitesimal unit, had set out to repair. He laughed bitterly in the poignant loneliness which has ever been the lot of Voices.

He thought also of what Sheehan had said. And he was not so unconvinced as might have seemed from his reproof of the wanderer.

CHAPTER XX

SHADOWS

BUT other things crowded the Farmers' Bank for the time out of his mind.

Only a few days remained before the primaries. During the two terms of office he had acquitted himself with skill and fidelity. Fear of him had doubtless restrained the machine from many characteristic depredations, but victory was well-nigh hopeless. He had become a candidate again only that the fight might go on, in the faint hope that something might occur to turn the tide in his favor. In the absence of the unforeseen he would carry the townships by a slight majority, but New Chelsea and Plumville would go strongly against him. The little city had grown remarkably in population and importance. A Sheehan could not have controlled it; the day of bosses of his sort, primitive, merely brutal and dishonest, had passed. But Greene, his successor, was of the newer and more dangerous type, subtle, secretive, resourceful, cautious, permitting no untimely excesses, careful to bind the business interest of the city to his ambition.

For three years he had been educating Plumville for this campaign. He could employ that most effective of all political weapons, ridicule. Who had given John Dunmeade a life mortgage on his office? What

was he anyhow but a kicker, a sorehead, a perpetual office-seeker, a fanatic, a fourflusher, a demagogue? What had he done during the six years of his noise-making in the county and state? Greene shot to the mark here. Plumville, like most of the American people, despised unsuccess. And John was an old story in which it had lost interest. It got the impression that in turning deaf ears to his plea it was righteously squelching a shallow, impudent, self-seeking upstart.

Even among the farmers John met with the unresponsiveness of discouragement. They would vote for him, most of them, but it would be perfunctorily, hopelessly. They were disappointed. The reform that had begun so auspiciously six years before was ending in dismal failure, with no other fruit than to evolve a new and stronger machine. John was no longer a hero. He could not be the man they had thought him; else would he not now be triumphant instead of in the last ditch?

Not even the unexpected reappearance of Sheehan, reminder of former victories, could revive enthusiasm. Sheehan had been almost forgotten, he had lost his significance. About the only interest he aroused was hostile criticism because John had been so soft-hearted as to consent to postponement of sentence.

Well it was for John's melting trust in himself and his fellows that he could meet an occasional Cranshawe or Sykes or Criswell. Their faith survived.

He met the trio, the night before the primaries, at Cranshawe's home on the pike. They did not pretend a vain optimism; they knew that they faced defeat.

"At any rate," remarked Criswell, at the close of

the discussion, "ye've had six years of good fightin'."

He spoke as though it were the end.

"Why, so we have — six good, full years!" said John with an assumption of cheerfulness that he did not feel and that did not deceive.

"I guess," said Cranshawe kindly, "ye think it hasn't paid. In one way mebby it hasn't. An' then again in another it has. It's like what I once told ye. Ye've showed us the way. If we hain't follered, it's our own lookout. Ye've done your part."

"Ye have," agreed Sykes solemnly.

And when he left, all three made a point of shaking hands with him.

"There," said Cranshawe, as the three stood in the stable yard, Sykes and Criswell making ready to go their ways; "there goes a man that's ready to quit. It's been a long time comin', but it's come sudden. It begun last winter. I guess we've got to wait for another leader."

"Don't blame him," said Criswell briefly.

"D'ye know what I think?" Sykes' high, nasal voice rose shrilly. "Damn the Amurrican people — that's what I think. They ain't fitten fur self-government. They ain't fitten to foller an honest leader. I'm done."

"I won't go so fur as to swear about it," echoed Criswell. "But that's my sentiments."

They drove away. 'Ri Cranshawe stood looking up to the stars. In their faint light the big, toil-hardened body towered majestic, a figure of strength and patience — and faith.

"How long, O Lord, how long?"

In the bank, behind closed blinds, Warren Blake was working at his desk. He had been seen coming out of the bank every night for weeks. It did not cause comment. It was like Warren Blake, people thought, to be working early and late. No one who had not the key would have detected in the widened eyes and imperceptibly twitching nostrils a hint of the racking anxiety within. His pallor would have been attributed to the garish gaslight overhead. Quite deliberately he added up the column of figures before him. They spelled his crime.

Very cleverly, very characteristically, he had gone about it. Hampden, he knew, caught in the big deal into which Warren had followed him, had drifted into it; had hardly realized, as in the heat of necessity he asked the cashier to certify checks for which there were no funds, that it was crime. Not so with Warren. In cold blood, with a nice calculation of the chances, he had stepped over the line that he had never before crossed. Once over, he had gone far. It had been a gambler's chance, the kind that many men take safely, and, when taken, had seemed all in his favor. But now the luck was running the other way. If the market sagged further, he would be done for.

No one, if told, would have believed why he had done it — because the bank was breaking anyhow under the load of worthless paper, most of it a legacy from his predecessor, and only a great deal of money could save it. It had been his pride to carry along an institution for the shakiness of which he was not responsible; it had become his life. He had risked all, even his own little carefully accumulated fortune, to save all, though he had made it a point of honor not

to risk the trust properties in his keeping,— he somehow made a distinction. It struck him now as a most absurd reason. He felt vaguely that to a normal man there would have been something almost mirth-provoking in it. But then, he reflected, he seemed to be different from any man he had ever known.

If the market should sag, how should he pay? Hampden, though bankrupt, would be able to work out of the hole; he could always get money somewhere. But Hampden could not, hence would not try to, save both. How then should he, Warren Blake, pay? With shame, certainly. With money — out of the question. How should he pay? He carefully tore the paper into tiny bits and threw them into the waste-basket. He had no need to preserve the record. The figures were burned into his memory. He rose to put the books away in the vault.

If the market should sag! . . . Suddenly came to him the sure foreknowledge that it *would* sag. For an instant panic filled him. The books fell with a crash from his nerveless arms. He stared wildly. How should he pay? . . . Then he recovered himself. He picked up the books and bore them to the vault.

He put the books in their places, then began fumbling around a dusty shelf in a dark corner of the vault until his fingers found and drew forth an oblong pasteboard box. He opened it and looked at what lay within. He took it out and played with it. The gleaming, blue-black thing seemed to hold a horrible fascination for him. It cost him an effort to put it away.

He set the time-lock, closed the vault. Then he

went to a sink and carefully washed the dust from his hands. Afterward he went into the street.

John Dunmeade, having reached home, put his horse away in the stable. It was past eleven o'clock and he was tired. But he was not sleepy and he hated to go in out of the clear, still night. So he strolled up-town, intending to have a pipe with Haig before going to bed. His way took him past the bank just as Warren stepped out. The latter stopped.

"Hello, Warren."

"Good evening, John."

"Working late, aren't you?"

"I often do." He hesitated. "Are you out for a walk?"

"Down to Haig's. Will you go along?" John asked politely.

"A part of the way, if you don't mind. Sometimes, when I've been — working hard, I like to talk to someone to forget myself."

John stared. "Can you?"

"Forget myself? Not readily. Can you?"

"Well, now you raise the question, I don't suppose I can. I don't suppose any of us can, this side of intoxication." John laughed as he said it.

"Was there anything funny in what I said?"

John achieved gravity with some difficulty. "Why, no, Warren, not that I'm aware of. I just had a vision of the pride of New Chelsea going on a jag in order to forget himself — and of course I laughed."

"But I did once."

"You did!"

"Only once. The next day I had to think of myself harder than ever." Warren's tone was absolutely matter-of-fact. John laughed harder than before.

"There's something," Warren continued imperturbably, "I've always wanted to ask you. Why do you laugh at me?"

"Eh? Why, Warren — why, 'pon my word, I don't know. And really," John added quickly, "I haven't laughed at you lately. I used to, because you took yourself so seriously. But recently I've contracted the same bad habit — so I can't afford to laugh at others. I hope you haven't been offended?"

"I'm not offended," Warren answered quietly. "I'm merely envious. You always seem able to laugh, however things go with you. I suppose it's a good thing to be able to laugh externally, even if one doesn't feel really mirthful. People who can do it seem to find in it an escape valve when the pressure is too high." And, as if to change the subject, he asked, "What are the prospects for to-morrow?"

"The primaries? Bad. In fact, they couldn't be worse."

"I thought as much. I'm sorry. I'd like to see you win."

John was thoroughly surprised. "I supposed your sympathies were with the other side."

"I've always voted for you." Warren reverted suddenly to their former topic. "You ought to take yourself seriously — because others take you seriously."

"They form a distinguished minority, however," John said grimly.

"Your enemies. I judge by the violence of their

attacks. I should say you are one of the men who have won the secret respect of their enemies."

John said nothing.

"I think," Warren went on, "I understand that silence. You're thinking of the people, who have turned you down. When we offer in good faith and affection a friendship or a service to another or to a people and it is rejected with ridicule and misunderstanding, that hurts. You think you're going to quit, I imagine. But do you think you can? There are calls to which one can't say no. Sometimes it's weakness and often it's strength — the strength of something outside, stronger than ourselves."

John smiled in the darkness. "I've heard you could reconcile the doctrines of free will and foreordination. But I didn't know you were a fatalist."

"Is that fatalism? I don't know," Warren said calmly. "I don't think you will quit. What a man is fitted for, he must do, whether he wants to or not. You are fitted for public service. You have something apart from mere intellect and ability, and, far rarer, the capacity to feel what we all accept in theory but not in fact — your relation to other men. I wish I could feel — could have felt it. Whatever gave you that fine sixth sense won't let you quit. It will carry you to the end — through weakness and strength."

Something in the man's voice rather than in what he said arrested John's interest. "Do you really think that, Warren?"

"There are things that one knows."

They halted, having reached the home of Silas Hicks, where Haig had his rooms. The cigar Warren had been smoking had gone out. He struck a

match to relight it. He held the flaming taper before him for an instant longer than was necessary and John could see his face. It was composed but pale, the eyes extraordinarily bright.

The match fell, burnt out. "This is the second thing I have known to-night. I'm glad to have had the chance to say it. And I hope you will remember that I said it — and that I wish, have always wished you well.— But I am keeping you. Good night." He walked on.

"Good night. And thank you, Warren," John called after him.

He did not go up to Haig's rooms. Instead, he turned and walked slowly homeward, thinking of what Warren Blake had said and of the man who had said it.

Primary day!

From one end of the state to the other the battle raged between red rose and white. When darkness put an end to the sanguinary conflict, both sides were claiming and neither side had the victory. The issue must be removed for decision to the convention.

Benton County, a Murchell stronghold, chose its complement of delegates instructed for the Honorable G. Washington Jenkins. Also it gave, as it thought, John Dunmeade his quietus.

Senator Murchell and his guest, Jenkins, received the returns at the former's home. During the evening Greene drove down from Plumville. Jeremy Applegate, too, was there, not overwhelmed as he should have been by the honor, to help tabulate reports. Other politicians of the county dropped in, smoking

Murchell's cigars and feeling very important in the nearness to their general and distinguished neighbor.

Once, about midnight, Jeremy answered a ring of the desk telephone, listened to the message and hung up the receiver without saying a word.

"What is it?" asked some one.

"John Dunmeade's beaten," Jeremy answered shortly.

Greene smiled contentedly. Murchell looked at the clerk.

"Don't seem overjoyed, Jeremy?"

Jeremy muttered something unintelligible, his eyes on the desk.

"What did you say?" Murchell leaned over, as though to listen more closely, smiling quizzically.

Jeremy pushed back his chair and got to his feet. He faced Murchell.

"I was sayin'," he said quaveringly, "I was sayin', it's a damn shame." Then, as he looked at the other old man, who had won the trophies as well as endured the service of the game, all the smoldering resentment of years blazed forth. The worn old body and the cracked, shrill voice shook with passion. "Overjoyed? No, I ain't overjoyed. If you want to know, I voted fur him. It's the only man's job I ever done since I come to be your heeler. You've beaten an' broken him, the best man this county ever had an' — an' you can have me kicked out of my job, if you like."

The politicians were too amazed at this unbelievable instance of *lese majeste* even to laugh. Open-mouthed, they watched him as, quivering with defiance and the hate of the oppressed, he glared at Murchell

much as in a former time he must have confronted the gray charge. Only Greene's smile continued.

They expected nothing less than that the lightnings would blast Jeremy where he stood. Hence, intensified stupefaction when Murchell said gravely, "Jeremy, you'd better go home. We'll talk about your job another time."

The old clerk turned and slowly stumped out of the room.

"Jeremy," commented the senator, "seems to have unearthed an unsuspected backbone."

The politicians, uncertain whether this was senatorial humor or not, chose silence as the course of discretion.

Later still, after the small fry had left, came the news that the Democratic party had freed itself and that Jerry Brent would control its convention; which meant that he would be nominated for governor. And this was matter for grave concern. Until nearly morning the three men discussed candidates. The tenor of their conversation seemed to indicate that Wash Jenkins was not assured of the Murchell support. Nor did he seem unduly resentful because of this fact. Wash was a model retainer, humbly willing to take what he could get.

It was in the course of this discussion that Senator Murchell said, "If John Dunmeade weren't such a stubborn fool, he would be just the man to meet Brent with." He spoke angrily.

Greene and Jenkins gave respectful if surprised assent.

CHAPTER XXI

GOLDEN FLEECE

EVEN the city seemed to feel and respond to June. One might have detected a slight retardation of the hurrying of the streets, a relaxation of care-taut faces. Men walked with coats flapping open to the warm breeze, straw hats at jaunty angles. Messenger boys dawdled and whistled, discussed blithely the Steel City's prospects for the pennant. Amid the roar of traffic and a multitude of shuffling feet the twittering of the ubiquitous sparrow rose incongruously.

But in the financial district was no relaxation. In the exchange was a howling, frenzied mob, struggling desperately to speed advancing fortune or to retain that which was vanishing. Clerks walked with nervous haste from 'change to office, to bank, talked in the loud voice of hysteria. Occasionally from some broker's office, a man would emerge, unnoticed in the general excitement, dazed and stumbling or walking swiftly as though in flight from some terrible monster. He would be one of those caught in the Alabama Iron and Coal squeeze.

A glutton, by methods that would have done credit to the robber barons, had raped the treasure developed by weaker brethren. And now greater barons, more gluttonous, springing upon him in an unguarded mo-

ment, by like methods were tearing the spoils from his grasp. But no one saw a joke. Before it could end two great banking-houses would be bankrupt, at least one daring, arrogant speculator sensationally ruined and a thousand little greedy ones made penniless.

The mad scramble rose to a climax. In his office the man who was the storm center stood over the ticker. He had struggled, with the unthinking valor born of desperation, against the unwavering, relentless attacks made upon him. They had forced him back, farther and still farther back to his inner lines of defense, into the last ditch. Driven out of that, he had made a last vain stand. Now he awaited the slaughter. He glared fixedly at the tape in his hand. There was not a quiver in his strong, stocky body, but his mouth was distorted in an unconscious evil grimace that bared his teeth, as the coiling tape recorded his ruin.

Suddenly the fixity broke up in an insane, helpless rage that demanded physical expression. From his twisted mouth came an inarticulate, wolfish cry. With a convulsive jerk he snapped off the tape, kicked the ticker until it fell with a crash. A clerk in the outer office heard the noise and rushed in; immediately, frightened by what he saw, he withdrew, closing the door behind him.

Stephen Hampden was not good to look upon as he rushed up and down the room, striking and kicking at the objects in his way. In an instant, it seemed, all the veneer of humanity and self-control had been stripped from him. He had become stark savage, a primitive beast balked of his prey. His face was purple, convulsed; he poured out unintelligible im-

precations on the "curs," the "crooks," the "traitors" who had broken him. He had no thought for those upon whom he in his turn had fallen. He was obsessed by the passion of his defeat.

The paroxysm spent itself. He flung himself, panting and still glaring, into a chair. The telephone rang. He paid no attention to it.

The clerk, trembling, opened the door. "You're wanted on long distance, Mr. Hampden. It's —"

"I won't talk to them!" Hampden snarled back.

The clerk withdrew. Hampden made an effort to recover himself, to steady his whirling brain. His rage had left him weak and shaking all over.

The clerk reappeared. "Beg pardon, Mr. Hampden," he insisted timidly, "but it's Mr. Blake of New Chelsea. He says he must talk to you."

"What's the fool want?"

"I — I don't know, sir."

"All right." Hampden caught up the telephone. He waited until the click told him that the clerk's receiver had been hung up, then snapped. "This is Hampden. What do you want?"

The precaution was unnecessary. The message was strangely worded; it would have meant nothing to an outsider. But Hampden had the key.

He hung up the receiver. And for a moment he allowed himself to be beaten down. Fear before a danger incurred in the heat of battle, and now become imminent, terrible, through the folly of another, ousted rage. Mere defeat, bankruptcy, paled before this new penalty which he must pay. And fear steadied him, cleared his brain. He wasted no time in futile regrets. His mind darted hither and thither, swift and

calculating, pondering and rejecting a hundred avenues of escape from the peril which must be averted before he could set out to recoup his losses. There was no thought of saving Warren Blake — only himself.

Late in the day he went out — to beg the mercy he had never shown.

Katherine Hampden was alone that evening. She was often alone nowadays, but not entirely because, as she had told John Dunmeade, she had been assigned a berth on the shelf reserved for unmarriageable females. There were many men who would have gladly undertaken to relieve her solitude. But these found her extremely unapproachable. Those whom she would have welcomed most gladly had least time for dalliance in drawing-rooms. Among her own sex she had less opportunity for companionship. The women of her uncertain set regarded her as "strong-minded" and a little queer; in their barbed gossip they attributed her queerness to failure to effect a well-advertised and socially advantageous marriage. She in turn, not unaware of their attitude, regarded them as tawdry, trifling creatures, wholly negligible, a feeling which she had the good sense not to put into speech. She herself was secretly skeptical of the strong-mindedness so doubtfully looked upon, but she was sufficiently vigorous of mind honestly to face the truth.

Very gradually, very logically, in no dramatic fashion, had it dawned upon her.

And the truth was — she was disappointed. Maturer perception, quickened by a glimpse of a different

ideal of life, had seen beyond the false setting of romance behind which men seek to hide the ugliness of the scramble for gold. She saw that scramble as it is, not the splendid instinct of a strong man joying in the match of strength against strength, but unlovely, inordinate greed, before which a man's soul shrivels as dry grass before the prairie fire. She had learned, too, that in the life was no place for her save that of spender, of a lay figure upon whom the scrambler could hang his trophies for exhibition. She would have married Gregg, had it not been for this and for the fact that the acid of his calling was etching more and more clearly upon his frank, clean exterior a picture of what lay within. As it was, she had sent him away.

The very vitality which a few years before had demanded splendor of outlook and environment now required usefulness of her. Hence membership in those boards and committees of which she had spoken so lightly to John Dunmeade had been sought, with a smile for their triviality, not thrust upon her as a social *memento mori.* But health and vigor of body and mind called, not merely for occupation, but for something vital to do. And that her life did not provide.

She was waiting for her father's home-coming. While she waited, she glanced through the evening paper. In it the day's doings on the stock exchange were featured. The account had it that Hampden had been hard hit, even vaguely hinted that he might have to fail. She was amazed at the lack of emotion with which she read that their fortune, hitherto so

potent and all-sufficing, had in a day been sadly shaken, if not totally destroyed. She tried to picture to herself what it must mean to them — the economies the privations even, the loss of caste among a set that measured worth by stocks and bonds. Somehow the picture could not profoundly alarm; partly, perhaps, because she knew too little of want to draw convincingly. She could not even feel deeply for her father, although she had for him a genuine daughter's affection and knew what a blow failure would be to him.

"Poor father!" she smiled, half pityingly. "I suppose nothing can persuade him that it isn't a horrible calamity. I ought to feel so, too, but — Heigho! is this Katherine Hampden?"

She went on turning the pages of the paper, until her casual glance was caught by a familiar name in a satirical editorial under the caption, "A Fool Errant." The fool errant was John Dunmeade, recently — and happily, in the editor's opinion — disposed of at the primaries. She began to read. There was really nothing to the effusion more than a few biting witticisms at the expense of a beaten man, but the lack of pith and logic did not lessen the sting. Katherine did not read to the end. She suddenly tossed the paper aside and sat bolt upright, a fair presentment of wrath, quite unconscious that she was flushing angrily.

"What a shame!"

Then the color deepened suddenly, and for another reason. Memory had recalled to her something she had once said to this man. "When you were a broken-down, middle-aged failure. . . . I should

be looking up at the men who were conquering. . . . And I should regret."

Well, her prophecy had been fulfilled sooner than she had expected. He had been cast aside, even by his own neighbors. She remembered how he had seemd to her when they had so unexpectedly met,—patently discouraged, a man upon whom defeat had set ineffaceable marks, and yet for all that, with something large and fine about him which forbade pity and commanded respect, made even such men as Gregg, with their vitiated ideals, want to do him favors "on general principles."

"To think that I could have said that to him!" she cried to herself. "What a cad I was! If only I hadn't said '*up* at the men who were conquering'! John Dunmeade, you tower above them all."

The crimson ebbed and rose again, as she thought of how she had unsexed herself before him. At the time she had called it courage, had felt almost an exhilaration in defying tradition. Now she was ashamed, because she had lowered her woman's pride and, even more, because it had been in the attempt to lure him into the very life against which she was now rebelling. It had not been courage, but a greediness that asked for both the good and the glittering in life. She had asked the impossible. . . .

She was still dreaming when her father came in.

His face was haggard, set in an ugly, bitter scowl. Yet something in his attitude, as he flung himself wearily into a chair, gave the lie to the defiant expression. There was liquor on his breath, and she knew that he drank only when under severe mental strain. The sympathy that had lagged as she read of the

wiping out of a fortune leaped when she saw the man who had lost it.

"Why, father, is it as bad as that?"

"Cleaned out," he said curtly.

She went to him quickly, laying an impulsive hand on his shoulder. And demonstrations of affection were rare in the Hampden family. "O, well, dear, never mind. It might be so much worse."

"Worse!"

"You might have been taken sick or had an accident or — or anything. O, I know that sounds foolish! And I am sorry, just for you. I know how you hate to lose. But I've just been thinking how nice it would be to go back home to New Chelsea and start all over again in — in something that wouldn't take all your time. I — I'd be so glad to get acquainted with you again." She gave a little laugh.

"You talk like a fool!" he replied roughly. "What could I do in that rube town — run a grocery store? Here's where I can make money. And I can make all we need, once I get things straightened out. I've been broke before. The immediate question is — to keep out of jail."

She started back from him with a gasp. *"Out — of — jail! Father!"*

Hampden, nerves on edge, himself suffering more cruelly than he was ready to admit, took an unnatural joy in making another suffer with him. "Out of jail, I said. I'm 'into' the New Chelsea bank and I've nothing left to pay with."

"O, father, how could you?"

"Drop that tragedy-queen act!" he rasped out. "I

could do it very easily. It's just what every banker does in a pinch. Only — I'm caught."

"Is — is it much?"

"It wasn't, but it is now."

"But we must pay it back. There are the bonds you gave me. And the New Chelsea houses that mother owns — she'll give those up. And —"

"Not a third enough."

She dropped weakly into a chair, staring at him foolishly. She was very pale, dazed by the sudden new calamity that had fallen. Like most women of her kind, she had no idea of what going to jail meant, save that some vague, terrible disgrace was implied.

"Quit looking like that!" he snarled. "You're shocked, ain't you? Stephen Hampden, pampering and spoiling you with everything you want, is different from Steve Hampden broke and in danger of going to jail, isn't he?"

That restored to her the use of her faculties. She saw that the roughness was only the expression of his suffering. "What you imply," she said gently, "is only partly true. The rest of the truth — but that isn't important now. Won't some one lend you the money. Henry Sanger or Mr. Grainger or Mr. Flick or —" She named several men of their acquaintance who, she knew, had been his business associates in the past.

"I've been to 'em all, whining and begging — y'understand, begging — gone down on my knees to 'em. And they won't do a thing unless I give security. The hounds! They're all in the conspiracy against me. They know they've cleaned me out, haven't left

me one dollar to rub against another. And they have the gall to ask for security!"

"They have been your friends and they will let you — go to — jail?"

"Do you think I told 'em that? I'd as soon do time as let 'em know. But it wouldn't have made any difference — they'd want security just the same."

"Have you seen —" she hesitated —"have you seen Mr. Gregg?"

"Ah!" he turned on her fiercely. "That's where you come in. If you hadn't been so high and mighty with your new uplift-novel notions and thrown him over, he'd have been with me in this deal and between us we could have stood 'em off. You can blame yourself for this."

"Do you," she asked quietly, "want me to go to him for you now?"

"Bah! Do you think he'd listen to you? This isn't a novel, it's real life. And besides, I've tried to find him and he isn't in town. He saw what was coming and sneaked away, so he wouldn't have to say no if I asked him to help. He's like the rest of 'em."

"But surely," she insisted anxiously, "the bank won't press you. They know you'll pay it all back when you can."

"What do you know about it? It isn't the bank, it's the government that will make the trouble. That fool Blake is in worse than I am. The bank's gutted, cleaned out. And the bank examiner is overdue. If he comes around now —" With a gesture he sketched the impending catastrophe.

Then she broke down. "O, father," she quavered,

"how could you — how could you? Hadn't you enough without st —"

"Don't you!" he growled furiously. "Don't you say that. Nobody ever had enough."

"Stephen, what is the matter now?" came a languid voice from the doorway. "And please, for my sake, lower your voice. It's so vulgar to quarrel before the servants." Mrs. Hampden entered and, with an air of utter exhaustion, deposited her substantial self in an easy chair.

"Father," Katherine explained, with cruel brevity, "has lost his money."

It was an unexpected tonic. The invalid suddenly sat bolt upright and, quite forgetting the vulgarity of quarreling within the hearing of servants, almost shrieked. "Lost our money? Do you mean to say, Stephen Hampden, that you've been selfish enough to gamble our money away after all I've suffered and denied myself —"

"Yes, madam, you're as poor as you were when I married you. Or, at least, you will be when you've signed over the properties I gave you."

"I won't do it. You gave them to me and they are mine and I won't —"

"Yes, you will," he interrupted savagely. "You'll sell your last petticoat, if I tell you to."

She threw her hands aloft and fell back, moaning, "O, in my weak condition, when my heart —"

"Maria, you're a fraud."

"You say that! When you know the doctor said —"

"That you ought to eat less and walk more. And even with your laziness and indulgences you're the picture of vulgar health."

"Mother," said Katherine impatiently, "I think you'd better go up-stairs. Father has other things to do than talk to hysterical women."

"And now my own child, for whom I've sacrificed my life, turns against me!"

"Rot!" snarled Hampden. "You've never done anything for anybody except let them pet and humor you all your life. Go 'way, both of you. I want to be by myself."

Mrs. Hampden rose. She managed a stagger that would have done credit to Bernhardt. Then, as neither husband nor daughter went to her assistance, she made her way, clutching at tables and chairs for the doubtfully necessary support, out of the room.

Hampden growled again, unintelligibly.

"Father, isn't there something to be done?"

"Murchell. I've an appointment with him in New Chelsea to-morrow. Some of his rascally politicians are in as deep as Blake and I. If the bank fails, it will kick up a rumpus that won't suit him a bit, I can tell you."

"Can he help?"

"He can. And he's got to."

"Do you mind if I go up with you to-morrow?"

"All right. And I wish," he exclaimed querulously, "you'd go away and let me alone."

She obeyed. But at the door she stopped and looked back. She saw his rough, defiant attitude dissolve into one of unutterable weariness.

In her darkened room she sat by the window for a long time, thinking with a feeling of sickening disgust on the sordid scene just enacted: husband and wife, at a crisis when each should be giving the other

the tender sympathy and support of those whom the life force has made one, thinking only of self; her father, with no sense of guilt, with no thought that the shame lay in the fact and not in the discovery, unreasonably bitter as though his plight were the result of others' injustice and not of his own greed. This was the other side, the unlovely other side, of that splendid life of conquest for which she had put the best of all aside. Thus it made victims of its votaries.

Through the open window came the whispering of trees, the fragrance of flowering vine and shrubbery, heavy on the damp, night air, sweet as though it came not from the heart of a vast ugly city. It set her to thinking of the countryside, of the town among the hills — she had called it home — and of the man whom others had cast aside.

CHAPTER XXII

THE HONEY POT

JOHN DUNMEADE had thought that anticipation would rob defeat of its sting. Not until the event, until Benton County, his own neighbors, had repudiated him, could he measure the hurt. There was in it more than mere disappointed ambition. A vital spot, he dumbly felt, had been reached. There was one thing which he would do; deep down within him was the unworded resolve that it should be his valedictory.

"There's something," he told Haig, a week after the primaries, "that has been haunting me."

And he told the other what Sheehan had said concerning the bank.

"Old wives' tales!" Haig grunted.

"But it might well be true."

"Well, what of it?"

"It ought to be looked into."

"Even so, what business is it of yours? You aren't the guardian of the public morals. Even if you want to be, the people have just clearly declared that they don't. Keep out of what isn't your affair."

"But I'm still district attorney."

"All right. If anything happens or any one makes official information before the end of your term, prosecute."

"But I understand my duty to include uncovering crime as well as prosecuting what others expose."

"How will you do it in this case?"

"I'll ask Blake to let me go over the books."

"He won't let you, of course."

"I think he will," said John thoughtfully, "if nothing is wrong. Especially when he understands that, if he doesn't, I'll subpœna him with the books before the grand jury. You know something about banking. I want you to come along with me."

"Well, I won't do it," said Haig flatly. "And see here! Don't you make a blooming ass of yourself by sticking your nose into other people's business. Especially on the mere suspicion of a discredited, revenge-seeking old grafter. Besides, banks are ticklish affairs. First thing you know, you'll precipitate a crash."

"And maybe prevent a bigger one later on. You miss the point, Haig. If there's nothing wrong, there will be no crash. But I have friends who have money and stock in the bank. And if our political bank history is repeating itself, they and the public have the right to know it."

"John," Haig argued earnestly, "don't you do it. Haven't you had enough? What's the use of making more trouble and enemies for yourself?"

"I know," John said patiently. "I've gone over all that. This is my last crusade. But it goes through. Because, if there's anything amiss, now is the time for it to come out, while it can help Jerry Brent."

"Great Scott! Have you still faith in the people? Don't you know what they'll do, if you uncover any-

thing? Just sniff daintily around and then walk off to vote for Sherrod or Jenkins or whomever the gangs nominate. And as for Jerry Brent, a bumptious, arrogant, hot-headed, theatric, jealous boor —"

"And an honest man," John interrupted, smiling. "Why do you object so strenuously, if you think there's nothing out of the way?"

"Because," said Haig bluntly, "I think it very possible that things aren't straight at the bank. But I like you and I don't want you to start a stink that will end the Lord knows where and can accomplish nothing. And I like Warren Blake — he's a good friend of yours, too — and I don't want to see him in trouble. Besides," he grinned, "none of my money is deposited in the bank."

"Is that all you have to offer for the defense? If it is — are you coming along or not?"

"I suppose," Haig grumbled, "I'll have to. You need a guardian angel. Your nose is as impertinently intrusive as Mrs. Hicks'. My own opinion is, the people of Benton County knew exactly what they were about when they decided to throw you out of your job."

So it happened that at a critical time in the fortunes of the bank and its officers John and Haig set out on their mission. They chose an hour early in the evening, after supper. They tried the bank first; it would be closed, but within, as all New Chelsea knew, Warren Blake was apt to be found, faithfully at the work that never seemed to end.

The dark green window shades had been pulled down closely, but a glimmering around the edges

showed that a light was burning within. At the entrance Haig stopped short.

"I tell you," he grumbled, "I don't like this. It isn't too late to change your mind. Let's put it off, anyhow."

For an instant John hesitated, then rapped on the door.

Blake might have been expecting them, so promptly was it thrown open. Surprise, however, was depicted on his face when he beheld the visitors.

"Good evening, gentlemen. Can I do something for you?"

"We'd like to have a little talk with you, Warren," said John.

"I'm pretty busy to-night," he answered. "If it isn't important, can't you put it off until Monday or Tuesday."

"But it is important," John insisted gravely. "It concerns the bank."

"The bank?"

Suddenly Warren, by some strange intuition, knew, as he had known that the market would sag, what this untimely visit portended. He felt the blood leave his face, rush to his heart. His hands and feet became icy cold. He stared stupidly at the visitors, as though his faculties were benumbed.

"I — I'm pretty busy to-night," he repeated dully. "Can't you put it off until Monday?"

"I think we'd better talk it over now, Warren," John answered.

The sense of shock seemed to pass away. The cashier threw the door wider open to admit them.

"Come in," he said quietly. They entered and he closed and locked the door behind them. Then he straightened up, all composure, to face them.

"I'll have to ask you to be brief. I'm preparing some papers for Senator Murchell and Mr. Hampden, and they'll be here soon."

"I'll come right to the point," John answered. "Warren, I want to see the books of the bank."

"That is an unusual request," Warren said calmly. "Why?"

"I've heard that you are carrying a good deal of worthless political paper and that the bank is in danger. I want to verify or disprove that."

"That's absurd. The bank is perfectly safe. And, of course, we can't let you see the books. You aren't even a stock-holder and have no interest in them."

"Warren," said Haig hastily, putting his hand on the cashier's shoulder, "I beg you to do as he asks. We're here in a wholly friendly way. And, of course, the bank is sound. You can rely on Dunmeade and me to do absolutely nothing, in that case, to harm it."

Warren shook his head. "You ought to know that it is out of the question."

"Then," said John regretfully, "I'll have to subpœna you to appear with the books before the grand jury on Monday." He drew forth two documents, one of which he gave to Blake. "Is it necessary for me to go through the formality of reading it to you?"

Blake did not reply. He seemed to be reading the summons with his usual painstaking slowness. There was not a tremor in the hand that held the paper. Haig, watching with an odd sense of misgiving, saw the cashier's lips curve in a queer smile.

John repeated the question. Blake looked up, the strange smile persisting.

"Before you make this service final," he said, "I suggest that you wait and explain your errand to Murchell and Hampden. They will be here soon. Just take chairs in the cage. While we're waiting, I'll finish my work."

Haig sighed in relief. "Now that's sensible, Warren. You can wait, can't you, John?"

"Certainly."

Blake ushered them into the cage, found chairs, offered cigars and, politely excusing himself, retired into the cashier's office and settled himself at the desk. Haig — and John, too — held by an uneasy curiosity they did not try to explain, watched him. For a few minutes he worked, with a speed that was not nervous haste, transcribing figures from the book before him and adding up columns. The latter task he repeated, as though to verify the results. Then he wrote a few lines and carefully blotted them.

This done, he seemed to have come to the end of his work. But he did not return to John and Haig; he seemed to have lost consciousness of their proximity. The pen fell from his fingers. His folded hands rested passively on the desk. He sat motionless, staring straight ahead into nothingness. Under the gaslight his face showed very white. A heavy, uncanny silence descended upon the three men.

Haig felt his misgivings return, trebly acute. "Let's get out of here," he whispered. "There's something horrible about that."

John's face, too, was pale. He had seen men, not lacking in physical courage, receive the sentence of

death in the same fixedness of attitude and gaze. "It must be worse than I suspected," he muttered. He wanted to accede to Haig's request.

While he hesitated, there came a rap on the door.

As though he had been waiting for just that, Warren rose, went to the door and admitted the new visitors. They were Hampden and Murchell. Hampden was the first to notice the presence of John and Haig.

"What are they doing here?" he demanded suspiciously.

"Come back into the office and we'll explain," Warren answered. "You come, too," he nodded to the men within the cage.

The five men gathered in the little office. No one sat down or offered to shake hands. There was a tense, silent moment, during which the new-comers surveyed the others keenly; they seemed to sense something dramatic, dangerous, impending. Warren broke the silence, calmly.

"Dunmeade wants to examine the books."

"Well, he can't do it," Hampden said quickly.

"So I told him," Warren continued. "And he followed the request up by serving me with a subpœna to appear with the books before the grand jury."

"You've no right to do that." Hampden wheeled sharply on John.

"Do you want to contest my right in court?" John asked quietly.

Hampden turned with a look of nervous apprehension to Murchell.

"Why are you doing this?" the senator demanded of John.

"Because I have information that the bank is carrying worthless political paper and is rotten. I have it from one who has helped manipulate such paper. From one, in fact, whose notes, supposed to be incollectible, the bank is now trying to collect."

"And on general suspicion you would take an action that might ruin the soundest bank in the country?"

"Not on general suspicion," John returned. "But on absolute knowledge. There!" He pointed to Blake's face.

"And there!" Haig's dry, shrill voice was like the crack of a whip, as he aimed a long, lean forefinger at Hampden. The latter recoiled as from a blow.

Murchell did not look at Blake or Hampden. From under wrinkled brows his eyes were boring deep into John's, seeking to test the strength of the latter's determination. His mind, like a startled deer in the forest, every faculty alert to sense and locate danger, too swiftly to put his thoughts into words, marshaled the situation and the peril, calculated the chances. He saw only one way out; boldly he took it.

"You can see the books. Now?"

"We may as well begin now. It will take some time, I suppose."

Hampden, vainly trying to regain an appearance of composure, tremblingly sat down. For a minute Warren said nothing. When he did speak, it was in a low, lifeless voice.

"I can save you the trouble. The statement I have been preparing for Senator Murchell contains what you want, I think. This is it." He pointed to the papers lying on his desk.

Slowly, mechanically, as one walking in sleep, he gathered up the books on the desk and carried them from the office to the vault. John will never know why he followed, a few steps behind. He saw Warren put the books in their places, then fumble around in a corner of the shelf. Warren seemed to feel his presence, for, hand still resting on the shelf, he turned to face John. The strange smile returned. Then the hand, grasping a black, shining thing, leaped from the shelf to his head. John's cry and the shot rang out together.

For an instant the body swayed, then crumpled in a heap on the floor.

Four stunned men, held in a horrible fascination, knelt by the ghastly thing, dumbly watching the struggle of that which is called Life to free itself from its prison of flesh. Of these men, three of them, each in anguish, was calling himself murderer. The twitching, greenish-white skin — the half-closed, bulging, glazing eyes — the open mouth through which the slow, convulsive breath bubbled hoarsely — the little hole from which blood and brains oozed like matter from a suppurating sore, burned into each man's memory, seared his soul, a picture never quite to be erased.

For nearly an hour — an eternity — shaken to the very center of their beings, they kept the death watch. Sometimes one of them spoke, in some senseless suggestion to which he received no answer, expected none. The hoarse, shuddering breath grew fainter, slower. The twitching of the face ceased. There was a shiver that passed over the whole body — then stillness. No

John's cry and the shot rang out together

one remembered to close the eyes. It lay there, more awful in its staring immobility even than in the unconscious contortions of the death struggle.

Haig was the first to recover himself. He caught John by the arm and drew him away. He tried to speak in his ordinary brisk tone. "Dead — as a rabbit." But his voice was harsh and quavering.

John recoiled from the grisly jest. Haig shook him roughly.

"I've got to do something to brace you up — there's no whisky. Quit looking at it and pull yourself together, or you'll go to pieces. You'll think you did it."

John stared at him wildly. "I — I did," he muttered hoarsely.

"Put that out of your mind," Haig commanded sternly. "We'll identify the murderer later. We've got other things to think of now."

John released himself from Haig's clutch and started for the door. Haig caught him again. "Come back here." He drew John into the office and forced him to sit down. "And you two, come."

Murchell seemed to come out of his daze. He touched Hampden, who followed him docilely and fell into a chair.

"I seem to be the only one with a trace of sanity left. And I," said Haig grimly, mopping his brow with a shaking hand, "I am pretty far gone. God! I didn't know it could be so awful. But we've got to decide whether we'll let this — how and why it happened — come out. By some miracle nobody seems to have heard. If the luck holds, we may be able to keep it quiet." He looked at Murchell.

But a great change seemed to have come over the politician during the racking hour. His face was ashen; he looked old as he never had before. All the firm self-reliance, the habit of domination, justified through so many crises, seemed to have broken down in the presence of sudden, violent death. He shook his head in a hopeless negative.

"There's no use trying," he said wearily, "if you go ahead with this investigation." He turned to John. "It's for you to decide. If this is kept quiet and you don't go on, I can save the bank — maybe. But if you do go on, there'll be a great scandal and I can do nothing. And — you've got to understand the situation — you'll have to prosecute Hampden here."

John did not answer. He was staring at the face of Warren Blake.

Haig mopped his forehead again. "Let's get out of here," he muttered nervously. "If I stay much longer with — that — I'll be a gibbering idiot."

He took the dead cashier's keys from the desk, turned out the light and went to the door. The others followed.

They forgot to close the vault. But it was well guarded.

New Chelsea had been long asleep, the streets emptied, when Haig and Murchell, accompanied by the doctor and undertaker — stock-holders in the bank and frightened into secrecy — drove a roundabout course by side streets and alleys to the rear door of the bank. Like thieves, they entered and carried what lay there out to the carriage. Then they drove away, praying

that no untimely passer-by had chanced to observe them.

But the luck held.

Later still, with another picture — a little, faded old woman become in an instant a foolishly smiling child — burnt into their memories, Haig and Murchell emerged from the home of Warren Blake. Haig stopped, looking up into the sky.

"I wonder what John Dunmeade is going through just now? I can see the end. The good have no luck. But how the forces of love and hate, good and ill, life and death play into the hands of an evil man! But sometimes he has to pay. At another time, when I have settled upon the price, you and I will talk of payment." He raised his hands to the stars. "And there's a curse on the man responsible for this night. Old man, do you say Amen?"

He caught the other by the shoulders, peered closely into his face and, laughing harshly, turned away.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE VULNERABLE HEEL

THROUGH a night that seemed endless, a man fought a battle old as sin itself. He had sought the solitude of the fields in a blind, vain wish to escape the issue and the thing that filled his eyes. Now he walked, now halted, now almost ran, in the struggle to regain clarity of vision, to restore calm to his tortured soul. But he could not escape. And, though he saw clearly — how clearly, as the night wore on! — calm eluded him. The roadside was alive with ghastly, grinning objects.

Other men might not have struggled so hard, even in the weakness following shock might have yielded, seeing no vital issue involved. But he, in his lonely struggle, had thought so long and deeply on a great underlying principle that it had become real to him, a breathing, pulsing being that had a life to be taken or nourished, a trust to be kept or betrayed. He had come so near to greatness. And now, at an hour when it seemed most to need stimulus and support, he was brought face to face with the temptation to desert. It was one thing in a moment of disheartenment to cry, as he had cried to himself, "I have come to the end." It was far different, when opportunity had come to revive a sinking cause, to stay his hand. He knew he had but to reach out to disclose, not an Ex-

calibur rising out of the waters to lend invincibility to him who would wield it, but a new prod for a calloused people, one fact the more to add to the knowledge, whose cumulative power in the end would — must — carry the people forward, upward.

He had learned, too, that justice is ofttimes cruel. Words of his own, now seeming almost prophetic, rang insistent in his ears, "When the eternal Force, impelling humanity to its ultimate purpose, moves, many individuals, blindly or by intention standing in its way, must be swept aside." A magniloquent, empty phrase, or a living truth? — he had that to answer and apply. War could not be waged without shedding of blood. A soldier dared not retreat merely because in the opposing ranks were those whom he would not harm.

And he was not his own man. The knowledge he had won of the vast, intricate network of crime and iniquity overspreading the nation, often parading under the guise of respectability, the inspiration that had been given him, the fine sense that enabled him to perceive the wider human relations, set him apart. He assumed no exaggerated importance in believing this. Whether he had or had not the splendor of intellect and temperament to incite and command revolutions — and he knew he lacked that — mattered not; he must serve in the capacity for which he had been fitted, and with the high courage which hesitates not before the necessary sacrifice. In the very fashion in which he had stumbled into this crisis — the chance, cloudy suspicion at which he had scoffed as absurd, unjustified, but that yet had impelled him to discovery — he felt a command from the all-controlling Force in which he believed, to go forward. He saw

in the crisis a supreme test of himself, his purpose, his ideal.

But there were other truths that flayed and scorched.

Vague notions of using his unshared knowledge as a club to win some advantage he hastily put aside. The temptation of expediency had never pressed him. But there were other senses, other instincts than those which revealed to him the universal brotherhood. Through them the man, not the brother, spoke.

It was Hampden, Katherine and John Dunmeade against the people.

And what did he owe the people, the calloused fools whose knowledge, if not complete, was yet full enough to show them whither they were going and whither they must turn, but who trudged contentedly on, indifferent to all but the present profit, thinking only of self, repudiating and sneering at those who offered honest service and counsel? The balance was all against them and in his favor. And, after all, what reason had he to believe that the knowledge he could give would pierce their indifference? He had already given them facts, the significance of which no sane man could deny, and with no result save to win him bitter enemies and bitterer discouragement. There were exceptions — yes, the Cranshawes and Criswells and Sykeses; and he loved them for their simple, rugged honesty. But he had already given them much. Six years is not a long time measured against the ages, but when they were taken from the golden period of a man's life and spent in endeavor made futile by others' unresponsiveness, they were enough, far more than he owed. Let some one else now take up the task to which John Dunmeade had been unequal!

He saw Stephen Hampden cowering, a suddenly broken, fear-palsied man, before the death agony, looking with a kind of wistfulness on the dying man's face, as though in Warren Blake's example he saw a way out of the tangle. A troop of miserable, pitiable figures marched before him — Slayton, Brown, Parsons, Sheehan, Blake — men whom he had punished, whose lives he had shattered or taken in his crusade — to what end? Their places had been taken by other men of like kind, the world no better, no wiser, so far as he could see. Must he add Hampden to the list? He was not inhuman, his heart cried out against inflicting further misery in behalf of a futile cause. And behind the troop marched a regiment of men and women, his neighbors, whose little savings would be lost, did the bank fail through his disclosures, but might be preserved if Murchell's promise to intervene were kept. Was there not more virtue in mercy than in punishment?

For long, in the fear of the man who knows himself weakening, he refused to face the crucial fact. But he had to come to it — to her — at last. He saw her as he had last seen her, the rose in bloom, a strong woman refined and softened by some heart process of which he knew nothing. If he went forward, he must cloud the splendor and beauty of her womanhood with disgrace and suffering. He revolted against the thought — why must she, innocent, and at his hand, be made to suffer the penalty that others had earned? Could he strike the blow? It made no difference that she had flouted him for unworthy things. As once before nothing that she could say had added to the temptation that lay in her very existence, so

now nothing that she had done could take from the fact of his love. For it lived. He could find through the years in unceasing work an anodyne to deaden the ache, but on this his Mount Olivet it lived again, a throbbing passion that submerged all things else. He had not the strength of God, he told himself; he could not be so merciless to her, to himself.

And he — had he not through many failures earned the right to show mercy? Those failures passed in review before him. He had hewed close to the line, and he had nothing to show for it. His finicalness had not always been wise. There was the case of the coal company. He had refused to share in it, seeing it a besmirched transaction, and it had resulted in nothing but good. A great natural storehouse had been opened, the world made richer, and the friends for whom he had feared had been given substantial release from care. He clung tenaciously to this evidence of his fallibility; he arraigned himself under a charge of incompetence and conceit. What right had he to think that his lips had been touched by a live coal from the altar, his heart granted infallibility of inspiration?

And always, even while the habit of years answered the pleas of his temptation, he saw the faces of Katherine, of her father — and of Warren Blake. Especially the face of Warren Blake. He tried to shake himself free of it and could not. It leered at him from the roadside, danced ghastly before him, sprang out at him from behind tree and stump, torturing, accusing him. It became an obsession. To escape it, he fled homeward in the waning night. The thing followed, racking his nerves with the vision: the

twitching, livid skin — the starting, glazing eyes — the open mouth through which the spasmodic breath came stertorously — the little hole oozing bloody matter. It was one thing too many; he felt it was driving him to the end of endurance.

He prayed feverishly for daylight.

By his window, as once he had watched a dawn of promise, he saw it come, but without promise. The sky over the eastern hills began to whiten. In the valley night became twilight. Gradually, like order coming out of chaos, the vague black mass before him took form as the blue-green hills that he knew. It was day, the grisly vision dimmed.

At last, the battle ended, too tired to seek his bed, he fell asleep in the chair.

He was awakened by the ringing of the church-bells.

It was a clear morning, the sun shining brilliantly. The peace of the Sabbath lay over all. The mellow, lingering resonance of the bells and the twittering of the birds served only to deepen the calm that had fallen. Along Main Street moved, with sedate stride, the weekly procession of church-goers, clad in sober Sunday raiment and wearing the grave aspect required of those about to engage in divinely-appointed rites. Not even the news which they would receive in church, that Warren Blake had dropped dead of heart failure — grim jest! — would disturb their gravity. For the news would be accompanied by assurances from Senator Murchell and Stephen Hampden that the bank would be in nowise affected.

The bells became silent, the hush deepened. From

the neighboring church, so near that he could almost hear the words, came the voice of the congregation in the doxology, *Praise God from whom all blessings flow.* It called forth no response from him.

He rose from his seat by the window and, obedient to the command of habit, made his morning toilet. When he was dressed he returned to the window. He was very tired. His will, as though worn out by the scene and struggle of the night, could not shake off the heavy mental and physical lassitude that oppressed him. Once he tried to recall the horror he had seen, but his inert mind balked. He did not think of what he would or would not do. He was conscious of no sensation, save the desire to drink in the sunshine; it seemed as though he could never again have enough sunshine. And he wondered how long it must be before darkness would cease to revivify the horror for him.

With sluggish curiosity he watched the figure of a woman walking down the street. Not until she turned in at the gate did he recognize her. There was no glad start. On the contrary a muttered, querulous protest escaped him. He did not wish to see her just then.

He waited until there was a knock on the door and the voice of the Dunmeades' only servant called him, "Mr. John, you're wanted down-stairs."

Reluctantly he rose and went down to the library. She was standing at a southern window through which the sun poured its golden flood. She heard him enter and turned. He halted, just within the door. For a moment, silent, they looked at each other across the sunlit room.

The inward protest died. Neither amid the mists of the morning nor facing the sunset glory nor beneath the white splendor of the moon, had she ever seemed to him so desirable as now, framed by the morning radiance. Yet she was less beautiful, as men measure physical charm. She, too, had had her night of horror and it had left its mark upon her. There was no color in her face save the shadows under her eyes. She seemed very tired, though she held herself firmly erect. But there was about her a new something — the humility of a strong, chastened woman, whose pride, but not whose courage, has been touched. And there was in her look that which he was glad to believe — for a little while. He thought it could not last long. But in an instant it raised to life the burning hopes and longings which for five years he had suppressed, had believed dead, even if that which evoked them still lived.

He could not understand then that the look spoke something which neither his strength nor his weakness could alter, which would glow the stronger for weakness, because she understood. And he did not know that her look was the answer to what he was mutely telling her.

There was no other greeting.

It was she who, with the brave directness that had always been hers, first broke the silence.

"I have heard what — what happened last night. And I have come to ask you to do nothing that will harm my father."

Unconsciously his face darkened. It was not because of her request, but because of the picture she recalled. "I supposed it was for that. You have —"

He would have said, "no need to ask." But she misunderstood and interrupted quickly.

"I have no right to ask this — or anything of you? I know that, more clearly than you can tell me. I put you in the way of unhappiness and then chose against you for things — for things of no value. It may give you some satisfaction to know that they are gone — though you can hardly believe that the taste for them went first."

"I am not so small as to find satisfaction in that. I didn't mean what you think, but that —"

"Please hear me out. I have no right to ask it on any account. I realize how much I am asking of you. I made them explain the situation fully to me, and I understand your point of view. You have an opportunity to advance the cause you have worked so hard for, and you believe you have no right to hold back to save unworthy men. I — I think you are right."

"You think me right!"

"Yes. Last winter I told you — you have doubtless forgotten —"

"I have not forgotten."

"I told you my notions of many things have changed. That is true. You are right — and yet I ask it."

"I don't understand —"

"How I can be so inconsistent?" she smiled wanly. "That should be very easy for you to understand. I — my father and Senator Murchell, the men who will profit by your silence, deserve nothing at your hands, at anybody's. I can't pretend that they would show mercy to you. But my father, at least, is a broken

man. Last night took away his courage. He believes that he is responsible for Warren Blake's —"

"No!" She saw him shudder and draw back. "No! I, with my rashness, am to blame for that."

"Ah! you mustn't say that." She took a step forward, eager in his defense. "I know what you've been through and how it must have given you the horrors. But you mustn't say that. Nobody could think it. You only did your duty. The men who led him into temptation are to blame, my father most of all. And I have no defense for him. I — I don't think I can ever greatly respect him again — or even deeply love him. He isn't worthy of your consideration. But I don't think he will ever commit another crime, even if he has the chance. And — he is my father.

"You think," she went on steadily, "that it is only my own selfish vanity that is concerned. It is partly that, I suppose. But it is more that I'm afraid for him. He is half-crazed from fear and shock, I think — I couldn't endure many more nights like last night. I didn't dare leave him alone. Even to come here I had to call in Senator Murchell. And I'm afraid, if it all comes out, he'll take Warren Blake's way out —"

"Don't!" he cried roughly, as if in pain. "I've gone over it all."

"I'm not trying to frighten you. And I didn't want to — to come to you." The steadiness was leaving her. She thought she saw in his lack of response a hostile determination. "I have no right to ask a man — such as you are — to sacrifice himself, his conscience for such a man. I can offer no — no adequate

return. But he is my father, and it is not — it can not be so very wrong to err on the side of mercy. And once you said — you cared —"

"It was true.— It has always been true!"

His voice was dull, hopeless. But her pallor was suddenly lost in the rush of crimson. Her hands behind her clutched at the curtains.

"You said once I — a rich woman would have to — come to you willingly — on your terms. We are no longer rich. But I — I do not find it so easy to unsex myself —"

He misunderstood, but he took pity on her. "You don't unsex yourself," he said wearily, "since I've just told you I care. But we don't need to introduce melodrama, do we? What I will do will not be because you ask it, but because it is for you. And not for a price. And — you haven't thought it out very clearly, have you? — what you mean is impossible in any case. If I went on with the investigation, you couldn't love the man who was prosecuting your father. And, just because you understand what is right in the case and are what you are, you couldn't respect and so couldn't love the man who weakly did what was wrong to him — even for you. And just now — you are very anxious to save your father."

The flood of crimson ebbed. She looked at him strangely. "Do you believe — that?"

"I know it. But you needn't be afraid any longer. Your father is safe, so far as I am concerned. That was settled before you came."

She turned from him, in an immeasureable relief, to look out of the window. The voice of the congregation rose again in the closing hymn, *Onward,*

Christian Soldier! She listened. Her brave, upright carriage relaxed, her head drooped, as though, the strain of suspense released, the fatigue of two sleepless nights had suddenly made itself felt. He filled his eyes and heart with the picture of her there, the golden radiance streaming about her and striking the answering glint of fire from her hair. Unconsciously he moved toward her, until he could almost have touched her arm. They listened in silence as the strains of the battle-song that all can sing rose triumphant. But to him it seemed the very refinement of irony. She guessed what he was thinking.

The hymn ended. She raised her head and faced him, unshed tears in her eyes.

"John Dunmeade," she cried, "I don't know yet how much of what you have said is true. And I don't know whether you have been weak or strong. But there are finer things than the strength of heartless justice. One of them is — must be — to be merciful, to want to show mercy where you owe none, where you believe you can gain nothing; as you have done. I can't — I shan't try to thank you. But I shall always be praying for you all the good things you have earned, as you go — and you will go — onward."

He merely repeated an old saying, "I haven't thought as far ahead as to-morrow."

"And now," he added quietly, "you'd better go, before church lets out. If people saw you here, it might set them thinking."

He followed her to the door.

CHAPTER XXIV

WHO PAYS?

WARREN BLAKE'S body was buried, and his tragedy with it. The luck had held to the last; no suspicion of a lurking mystery had been breathed. And William Murchell returned from the funeral to a birth.

His enemies have called him inhuman, lacking in moral sensibility; there are episodes in his career which support the charge. But deep down within him had always lain something that, long pregnating, now fought to win to the light. He had felt it move first when a hot-eyed young reformer with more passion than truth had declared the strategy, of which the master was so proud, to be nothing but the furtive workings of primitive, dishonest craft. It had stirred again in a moment of resentment when with bitter cynicism he had recounted his services to a treacherous monarch; and again in the depression of unaccustomed defeat and illness; and yet again when a humiliated, rage-shaken enemy had drawn an ugly comparison. And as, keen mind tracing back with lightning swiftness to prime causes, he had watched the death-throes of Warren Blake, it had begun the final struggle for complete, distinct life. New life is not brought forth without agony. And the soul of Murchell writhed in labor. It was not physical hor-

ror; that, though older and weaker in body than John Dunmeade, he had overcome while the other was being overwhelmed. It was spiritual revolt, and it shattered the smug complacency with which he had always observed himself, rent the tissues of lies and hypocrisies with which he had defended his achievements. He was suddenly arraigned before himself, become by the tragedy most pitiless of judges. Startled, angered, protesting as at some gross outrage put upon him, the habit of a lifetime strove to strangle the new being at its very birth — in vain.

The vigorous mentality that had hungered and thirsted for action, lusted for sharp combat, sought insatiably for power and ever more power, now turned upon himself; with precise, merciless strokes dissected his life for him, revealed its essential ugliness, disclosed overlooked potentialities. There is no fact more tragic than the strong man, who has battled unceasingly, confronted with the truth that his striving has been worthless, purposeless. And not always does the dazzling, white light of revelation come to men while there is yet time to perceive and serve the new purpose. To Murchell, purpose had not yet come, but the sordidness, the narrowness, the cruelty of strength misused, he saw.

It was the evening after the funeral. He was alone in his library. But he was not reading. He was angrily watching the gathering of a belated force in his existence.

He frowned when from the hall came the sounds of altercation, heated on one side and coolly confident on the other. Then the door was thrown open and Haig, followed by the protestant man-servant, entered.

The novelist briskly crossed the room and planted himself in a chair before Murchell.

The involuntary host greeted him inhospitably. "I told Jim I would see nobody to-night."

"So the Ethiop told me," said Haig blandly, "but I assured him that I had an appointment. And so I had. I promised myself to come to see you to-night."

Murchell waved to the servant, who promptly disappeared. "Well, what do you want?"

"You remember, Saturday night I said you and I would have to discuss the matter of payment? 'The time has come, the walrus said.'"

"Well?"

"Senator Murchell, have you a conscience?"

"Are you trying to be impertinent, young man?"

"How impertinent? A conscience isn't necessarily disgraceful, though it's often a nuisance. I'm merely trying to verify an impression. The other night, while you were watching Warren Blake die, I got the notion that you had one."

"No doubt, you were vastly surprised!" Very sarcastic, this.

"Since you ask me, I was. I have always shared the present popular opinion of you."

"Humph!"

"Exactly! Senator, you have the gift of using the right word. A thousand Solomons couldn't have appraised the value of public opinion more nicely than that 'Humph!' However, your conscience is probably so minute as to be inconsiderable."

He leaned back comfortably, placed his finger-tips accurately together and began to unburden himself. "Well, it's all over. Warren Blake is out of the

way. Hampden won't be disgraced. There's to be no scandal. Your plans to save the bank are under way. Other plans of yours are no longer in jeopardy. So it's time to think of payment. I just dropped in to inquire, what is the market price of souls at present?"

"Souls?"

"Precisely. They're a chief article of commerce among you politicians, I believe. There's Dunmeade's, for instance. I have just come from him. He isn't a very happy man, Senator Murchell. He's oppressed by the knowledge that he has been weak. He has lost his pride, his belief in himself, his sense of absolute honesty — call it soul for short. The poor fool even thinks he is to blame for Warren Blake's shooting himself. Ah! you smile?"

"I wasn't aware of smiling," said Murchell shortly.

"Well, you ought to. The notion is absurd, of course. You and I know better. We know who killed Cock Robin." Haig laughed insinuatingly.

"You have a strange sense of humor. Just what are you trying to insinuate?"

"I mean that we know that the man who killed Warren Blake was the man who killed Creighton, Hawkins, Delehanty, Burns, Schneider and Larkin. And he's the fellow that created an atmosphere of dishonesty in political banks and public treasuries, made opportunities for thievery, encouraged and profited by peculation — in short, the man who devised and built the machine whose creatures and victims have paid the penalty of their crimes with suicide. Do I make myself clear? I'd hate to have that list of suicides on my conscience — Creighton, Hawkins, Delehanty,

Burns, Schneider, Larkin, each with the messy little hole in his head, the starting, glazing eyes, the — Ugh! You know what it looks like now. And you can cut another notch in your gun, Senator Murchell — for Warren Blake."

Murchell sat up angrily. "That isn't true. I'm not responsible if a few weaklings aren't able to resist temptation and take the easiest way out."

"It was Cain, I believe," Haig purred, "who first pleaded that excuse."

"See here, Haig! I'm a patient man." His manner hardly supported this statement. "But there are limits to my patience, even when talking to a rattle-brained eccentric. If you have anything important to say, say it. Otherwise —"

Haig leaned over, interrupting. "When he can't help himself, a patient man listens to whatever is said to him. Just now you can't help yourself. And," he added menacingly, tapping the senator's knee to emphasize his words, "I'd advise you to listen. Will you?"

"Go on."

"That's sensible." Haig resumed his easy attitude. "All this is important as leading up to our discussion of the value of souls. Let's take up Dunmeade's case. We have a brave, if not very successful, fighter for a Cause — a Cause, you understand, with a capital C. He stumbles upon a bit of information that seems to require certain action. He enters upon that action and finds worse than he expected. Warren Blake shoots himself. A scandal impends. Hampden is threatened with disgrace — perhaps worse. And Dunmeade stops. He pays for the privilege of stop-

ping with some peace of mind and self-respect. That ought to be worth something to you, oughtn't it?"

"He didn't do it for me."

"You anticipate the argument, Senator. It is true, he didn't do it for you. He did it for Katherine Hampden. You and I don't think much of her, a mannish, passionate, forward thing with the savage's weakness for brilliant gewgaws. But the man's in love with her. Still, that isn't the point. It is — something of value has been rendered, and the one who profits most by it will have to pay for it. You see that, don't you?"

"Get on with what you have to say."

"Dunmeade's mouth is closed. The question now is, who profits most by his silence and hence will have to pay? It isn't Hampden. I think I understand the political situation pretty well. Just now, when you're trying to scramble back into power and Jerry Brent has taken their convention out of the hands of your Democratic friends, for another bank in which you politicians have had your dirty fingers to fail, with another cashier putting a messy little hole in his head, would be most inopportune. Also, you've put up money to cover Hampden's shortage. I've never heard you accused of doing anything for anybody without return. And since you've put up a lot of money without security, it must be because silence just now is peculiarly valuable to you. Now do you get the point? Are you ready to pay?"

"Haven't I paid enough?"

"Can you ever pay enough to balance what Warren Blake and John Dunmeade have paid?"

"What do you want then?"

"Well, you're trying to get back into power through the convention. The general impression is that you can't beat Sherrod. But I guess differently. You're not the kind of man to go back into the scramble unless the chances for a win are pretty good. Well — *nominate John Dunmeade.*" He paused in astonishment. "Eh? You're not surprised? You've thought of it yourself, then!"

"The thing," exclaimed Murchell, and extreme irritation was speaking, "is preposterous!"

"You have thought of it as much as that, then? But why preposterous to nominate a fine, big, honest man? He has ability. His record is flawless, or will be so long as this bank business doesn't come out. He has the respect of everybody, even yours, though a stiff-necked and rebellious generation has cast him aside. Measure him against Wash Jenkins or any one of your kind you choose; his character is something you haven't been able to go to the people with for many a year in this state. And his nomination would pull the teeth of dangerous Jerry Brent."

"Power," said the senator virtuously, "isn't to be taken lightly. Even if I could do it, which isn't probable, I certainly don't propose to make a joke, a fool, of myself before the political public by helping a narrow, pig-headed, unpractical romancer to a powerful office. The wrong man in power can do a terrible amount of damage, young man."

"Yes, that's been proven," said Haig dryly. "But 'unpractical' and 'romancer'— you need a new point of view, Senator. Just what is romance? Gilding the truth, of course, to make it seem beautiful when it is ugly, giving the appearance of value to what has

none. And what is a practical man but one who sees and understands the needs of men and honestly tries to serve them, offers an easy, simple avenue to humanity's goal, which, I take it, is happiness. Your man of wealth, continually grabbing for more than he can possibly consume or wisely use, is the true romancer. Your boss, who sees something beautiful in naked, purposeless power, is another. You are a romancer, Senator Murchell. John Dunmeade is the most practical man I know, because he sees true, sees evil as evil and good as good. If the world were to adopt his ideal of subordination of self, happiness, universal happiness, would be attained in a day. To be more specific, if this state were to follow his ideal of simple, straightforward, common-sense honesty, political corruption would cease to exist, a vast amount of injustice would be corrected and popular government justified."

"It can't be done."

"You mean it won't be done. It can be. It won't be done because the world is so full of romancers, for ever chasing the valueless, that a really practical man, offering a natural, logical solution of its difficulties, isn't listened to. You'll have to find another excuse, Senator Murchell."

"Well, then," said the senator grimly, "you may put it that I, a seeker after the valueless, don't propose to help a practical man who has rejected my honest offer of friendship and spent six years villifying me before the people of this state."

"So that's why it's preposterous? That's the measure of your sort, is it? Fighting you, telling the truth about you, are what disqualify a man for public office.

You grind everybody, everything — life, death, tragedy, love — in the mills of your greedy ambition, and you are willing to pay only the least penny you must. Blake the suicide, Hampden the embezzler, Dunmeade the lover, are but so many pawns in the game of Murchell the — can you give me the word?"

"Your vivid imagination ought to be equal to that." But the senator began to feel that he was nearing the point where patience ceased to be a virtue.

"For once it balks. But that's of incidental importance. I have seldom received so low a compliment. I am overlooked in this situation. I, too, am a passive pawn in the game of Murchell, to be moved or disregarded as he chooses! Dunmeade's mouth is closed. But, Senator Murchell, I know as much as he." He sprang to his feet. "What's to hinder me from publishing the scandal, from telling the people that another bank has been looted by the politicians, another added to the list of Creighton, Hawkins, Delehanty —"

"I thought we'd come to that. I'm not easily frightened, Haig. You won't do it."

Haig seated himself on the table, the homely, cadaverous features lighting up in a sardonic grin. "Now the funny part of it is, you aren't sure whether I'm bluffing or not. Let me assure you, I am not. We're a pretty triangle, each with the drop on the man in front of him. You hold over Dunmeade's head the fact of Hampden's disgrace, he gets me with his friendship, and I can bring you down with my knowledge of this bank business. I'd hate to lose Dunmeade's regard by confronting him with the necessity of prosecuting his lady-love's father. But, by the

Lord! I'm not afraid to fire first. And I think you believe that."

Murchell did not answer. He was making a strong effort to control his rising irritation. But he listened intently because he did not know Haig well enough to decide whether the latter was really dangerous.

"You think my motive is lacking, perhaps?" Haig inquired coolly. "I'll come to that in time. Do you know how I'd figure out the situation, if I were you? I'd say to myself, 'Here am I, a dry-veined old Pharisee, trying to climb back into power after the people and the interests I've lied, thieved and corrupted for have kicked me out. Out of all the years of my political life I haven't one fine piece of statesmanship, one great, substantial thing done for the people whose government I have stolen, to justify my career.' You haven't such a justification, have you? I'll let you be the judge. Name it and I'll walk right out of this room, taking my request with me."

"When I undertake to defend myself," said Murchell with such coldness as he could achieve, "it will be before a less prejudiced judge."

"You're to be the judge, not I. Name the one fine, decent, vital thing that will clear your path."

He waited.

Murchell was angry now, far angrier than when Sherrod had drawn his comparison. And he needed anger, not as a defense to Haig's assault on his complacency, but because what he had just heard was an echo of what the new-born inner monitor had been declaring.

"He can't! He can't justify himself!" Haig had a nasty, sneering laugh that grated on the nerves.

"And then," he went on remorselessly, "I'd say, 'In the little time left me I can't make up with good for the evil I've done. Death-bed repentance isn't worth much. But there's John Dunmeade. I am what I call a practical man — that last refinement of the type, a practical politician — and I can't understand it, but I know that Dunmeade is a man to whom honesty, decency, patriotism — empty words to most men — really have a meaning. There are a few such men. He has fought honestly in the face of defeat for something I have no use for, an ideal, a thing that only such fools as dreamers, poets and novelists believe in. And now, through love for a woman who isn't worth while, he has committed what to him is a weakness. I can't understand how compromise with conscience should bring suffering to a man, but I know it means that to him. And I profit by it. I can't rub out the record of the six — no, seven — men, each with the messy little hole in his head, nor of the thousands of others who have sold their souls to make me rich and powerful. But, instead of sneaking back into my old place as corrupter-in-chief to Big Money, I can make Dunmeade's weakness worth something. I can enter one decent achievement on the blank side of my ledger. I can put an honest man where he can accomplish a little of the good he has dreamed of doing.'

"And then, even if the thought of having some justification for my existence didn't stir me, I'd say, 'And here's Haig, the melodramatic, rattle-brained eccentric, who has come here thinking he could arouse what I haven't got — a conscience. And Haig has an old grudge against me to wipe out.'"

"What have I ever done to you?"

"Now for my motive.— Do you remember Wrenn — George Wrenn of Clarion? Or have there been so many Wrenns that you can't keep track of them? Let me tell you his story. He was a preacher, not a very strong man, but a fine, big, clean-hearted fellow — something like John Dunmeade — who believed in his fellowmen and loved them,— the kind that would sit up all night with any poor, suffering wretch or share his last dollar with those who needed it less than he did. Everybody loved him. He married a widow who had one son. He was a good husband, and a perfect father to that boy. I know, because I was the boy. They had a reform wavelet in Clarion and sent Wrenn to the legislature. That was the year you almost failed of reëlection to the senate. It cost you a million and a quarter to win, you may remember. There was a point where you needed just one vote, and your decoys got after Wrenn. He held out for a while, but — O, you know how it works. He was poor, there was more money in sight than he had ever heard of, and they found his price — at seventeen thousand dollars. And he was cheap, too, comparatively. I think he must have been temporarily out of his mind, for he didn't really care for money. He went home, a shame-broken man. They couldn't prove it on him, but everybody knew he had taken money. They turned against him, his wife died broken-hearted and he had to leave Clarion. The money was soon spent; that kind never lasts. He went down-hill fast and finally, a miserable, drunken wretch, he put a bullet through his head. I saw him do it — just as Warren Blake did it. So you can cut

still another notch in your gun. Eight on the list now — Creighton —"

"Quit that!"

"Good God!" Haig jeered. "I believe he has a conscience, after all. Can you sleep o' nights, Senator Murchell?"

Murchell got slowly to his feet, in his eyes a light so terrible that even Haig for a moment was startled.

"You — you —"

Haig laughed insolently. "Go on, Caiaphas, say it. Say the thing that will restore your smug complacency."

But it was not said.

White heat consumes quickly. The dumb passion soon burned itself out. The rigid pose melted into one of utter weariness.

Haig watched, incredulous yet pitiless. "I suppose," he said, "if I put it in a book, nobody would believe it. I don't know that I believe it myself, yet. But you can understand now that I am sufficiently dangerous to — er — merit your consideration?"

"He wouldn't take it — at my hands." The arrogant habit of a lifetime had ceased to protest.

"Dunmeade? O, that's a problem in psychology. I think he will. In fact, I know it, since I came here with full power of attorney from him. With men like Dunmeade the first compromise is the crucial one. As to means, you will find him more tractable, I fancy. My own opinion is, he will be a more useful man for it. He won't be very happy at first, though.— I'll be saying good night."

He took a few steps toward the door, then stopped,

hesitating. He turned back. His insolent, overbearing manner fell from him.

"Senator," he said quietly, "I may have overdone it. Wrenn, Blake, all those fellows, aren't worth a qualm. Dunmeade is —"

But Murchell was not listening. He had forgotten Haig. He was watching the second birth of a young man who once had been.

Not the next day, nor the next, but on the third, the travail ended, William Murchell emerged from his brief, mysterious retirement, to place himself at the head of his clamorous troops. It has been said that the campaign which followed was the most brilliant of his career.

CHAPTER XXV

THE BIG LIFE

ONE day John Dunmeade stood before the people of his state a lonely figure, almost forgotten amid the tumult of discussion that raged over the respective merits of Sherrod and Jenkins. On the next a few heads turned questioningly toward him, a few newspapers began darkly to hint that his candidacy might be more formidable than had been supposed. The exigencies of the Republican case, it seemed, demanded that Jerry Brent be met with a candidate of equal or greater fitness; and neither Jenkins nor Sherrod were entirely palatable to the people. Other molders of opinion followed suit. Soon a small host of them were shrieking that John Dunmeade must be nominated. The times required it, the people demanded it, no one else could beat Jerry Brent; in short, if these members of the press were to be believed, the Republican party was in danger of defeat and had experienced a timely conviction of sin. Within a few days half the newspapers of the state were loudly trumpeting that Dunmeade's services to his party must be rewarded; the other half laboriously denying that service had been rendered and sneeringly pointing to the late primaries in Benton County as evidence of his popular weakness. In the general uproar the plaintive

piping of the New Chelsea *Globe,* veraciously claiming to have been first to support the Dunmeade boom, was almost lost.

No one suspected a prompter.

The people, so insistently told that they demanded the choice of the young reformer, began to believe it. A surprising number suddenly discovered that they "had always been for Dunmeade anyway"; they were exceedingly proud of the fact. The thing was contagious. Gradual but swift as the rising Chinook, it swept over the state, a flood of enthusiasm. Part of it was genuine; far down in their hearts, beneath the calloused crust, the moral sluggishness that hated change, lay a germinating civic consciousness implanted by the very man who had become a hero over night. Now it spoke and without fear because when all were shouting courage was not needed. With an impulsive generosity as kindly as illogical, they remembered the years of his discouragement and proceeded to the other — and more dangerous — extreme of raising him on a pedestal. The politicians — all but a few — were astounded; supporters of Jenkins and Sherrod alike were profoundly alarmed. One would have said that somebody, finding dry wood and tinder already laid and the wind blowing high, had struck the spark and set the pile ablaze.

Somebody had. But that somebody kept out of sight as long as possible.

Two days before the convention the Honorable G. Washington Jenkins bowed to the storm.

"I yield," he said, "to a spontaneous demand of the people."

"Sentiment," declared Murchell solemnly, "has

crystallized. Dunmeade's the man." He explained that this decision had been reached by him in view of the evident wish of the people, and he added truthfully that he had not seen nor discussed the approaching convention with John Dunmeade. The Murchell men in the organization whooped with delight. A stroke of genius this, the master allying himself with the popular candidate. Politicians dislike to run counter to the people, save when stern necessity compels.

The day before the convention the delegates began to gather at the capital, picked men — if not wisely picked — of their clans; and chieftains of high and low degree come to view, to participate in, perhaps to share the spoils of, the impending battle of giants. In parlor A of the State Hotel sat Murchell and in parlor B of the Lochinvar sat Sherrod, playing against each other for votes. Between them fluttered the delegates and those who had delegates to sell, like hungry summer flies. But they found — the little fellows at least — no honey-pot at Murchell's end; no scandal must mar the nomination of Dunmeade. (As for the captains of tens and captains of hundreds, that is another matter, into which we may not intrude.)

In crowded streets and sweltering, smoke-clouded lobbies excitement ran high. Men forgot the oppressive heat of the night in the more fervent heat of conflict. The din of vociferous argument, brazen prophecy and equally loud speculation rose. Through it was a new undercurrent — of fear. If, as Sherrod was proclaiming, Murchell had started the conflagration, he had made a risky move. For if Sherrod were now successful in the convention, what seer so

bold as to foretell victory over Jerry Brent in the elections? Neutrals anxiously strove to learn whither the tide of battle ran.

They wondered, as did friends and spies, at the air of confidence that reigned in the Murchell camp, now become the Dunmeade rallying ground. It was the only quiet spot in the capital, contrasted significantly with the nervous atmosphere of the Sherrod headquarters. Such contentment with the situation could not be feigned! It was infectious; it spread out among the delegates who had pledged themselves to vote for Dunmeade, and nullified the frantic efforts of Parrott (nominally managing Sherrod's campaign) to start a stampede; it kept the neutrals wavering.

Those delegates and captains who met the leader perceived not that since Sherrod had defeated him two years before a new Murchell had been born. They saw only the same resourceful, compelling, steadfast general riding back into power. They repeated credulously the popular fiction, always encouraged by him, that he had never gone back on a deal; many were present who could testify otherwise of Sherrod. They would not have believed that in this battle, in which his skill shone brightest, the old warrior spirit joyed not at all.

And over the scene of conflict hovered a formless one, unseen, unheard, unfelt, as spirits always are, waiting but for the crucial moment to swoop down and decide the issue.

Came a lull in the battle, an hour toward morning when the delegates had retired to allotted cots or halves of beds or, more often, to woo Fortune over

some table of chance, when the reeking lobbies were depopulated and the headquarters of the generals deserted by all but their respective staffs and the yawning reporters. In parlor A of the State Hotel quiet yet reigned, the quiet of men resting on their arms. Greene and the half dozen other men present, hollow-eyed and pale but under too heavy strain for sleep, conversed by fits and starts. Their chieftain sat by a paper-strewn table, eyes closed and head bent forward as though he were dozing. His companions had urged him to seek his bed for a few hours' rest, but he had refused; he seemed to be waiting for something of which they had no inkling.

His waiting was not in vain.

There was a knock on the door and Greene admitted a messenger, him who once before had lured Murchell from his retreat on an errand, if not of mercy, at least of salvation. Murchell was instantly awake. Paine went to him and whispered his message. Murchell shook his head.

"Tell him," he said aloud, "if he wants to see me, he'll have to come here."

Paine whispered a protest.

"Tell him," Murchell cut him short, "John Heath will meet him here."

The messenger started, looked hastily around at the others and grinned in sickly fashion. But he departed immediately, leaving the men in the room to wonder what charm lay in the unfamiliar name of John Heath.

In less than five minutes, rumor outrunning the fact, the hotel was alive: Sherrod had asked for a conference with Murchell! The reporters ceased to

yawn. Poker games were brought to an abrupt end. In the corridors, in various stages of disarray, gathered a knot of excited delegates whom the news had mysteriously reached.

Murchell men smiled triumphantly when they saw Parrott and Sherrod, wearing an air of confidence not wholly convincing, emerge from the elevator and make their way along the corridor to parlor A. The delegates pressed eagerly behind them to the door.

Sherrod and Parrott entered, carefully closing the door behind them to the intense disappointment of the delegates outside. Parrott went jauntily up to Murchell and shook hands.

"Well," he grinned, "we've been having a fine little shindy, eh?" This for the reporters.

"Glad," grunted Murchell, "you're enjoying it." There was a laugh in which Parrott did not join. Neither Sherrod nor Murchell offered salutation to the other beyond a brief nod.

The senator waved his hand and all but Greene left the room, reluctant but obedient.

"Well?" Murchell looked past Parrott to Sherrod.

"See here," said the last. "Can't we get together? You've got to admit that we've got you beaten."

"If you think the delegates you've been buying will stick, you're mistaken, Sherrod. I've sold you more than fifty myself."

"I don't believe it," snapped Sherrod, and added, inconsistently, "Who are they?"

"That," answered Murchell, "you'll find out in the morning."

"Quit bluffing and get down to cases. You know

damn well you can't beat us in the convention. You aren't trying to. You started all this racket over Dunmeade just to work up a sentiment that will make it harder for me to beat Brent. You're so anxious to get even," he exclaimed bitterly, "that you don't see you're in danger of stirring up a revolution. What will you take to quit?"

"The revolution has started, Sherrod. And you'll never beat Brent."

"Won't I? We'll attend to that when the time comes."

"Because," Murchell continued calmly, "you won't be nominated." He turned to the governor. "Parrott, how much have you paid Sherrod to support you for senator?"

"What's that got to do with this convention?" demanded Sherrod.

"I just want to show Parrott the kind of men he's working with. How much, Parrott?"

"Nothing," lied Parrott, albeit with evident uneasiness.

"Then you're lucky," Murchell commented. "Dan Hasland paid him two hundred thousand for the same promise."

"That's a lie," Sherrod declared hotly.

"Greene," commanded Murchell, "call Hasland in, will you? He's in the room next to mine. That is, if Parrott and Sherrod think it necessary?" He turned inquiringly toward them.

"I guess," Sherrod growled, "Parrott knows I'll not go back on him."

"Does he?" Murchell inquired dryly. "Look at him!"

And, indeed, Parrott's face just then showed anything but implicit confidence in the good faith of his leader.

"You needn't go, Greene. And," Murchell added, "I may announce right here that Hasland will succeed me as senator."

"Doesn't that depend," sneered Sherrod, "on who controls the legislature?"

"We'll control it." Murchell's brevity was impressive.

Greene could have hugged himself with delight as he saw Parrott visibly perturbed, and Sherrod struggling to repress the rising passionate hate and fear of the man before him. Greene had been a gambler and he felt a profound reverence for the man whose nerve in so big a game showed no tremor. Even he thought Murchell's air of contemptuous confidence, of weariness as though he had a distasteful but not at all difficult task to perform, assumed.

A long pause was broken by Parrott anxiously. "Senator, what have you got up your sleeve?"

"Sherrod's withdrawal."

"Who is going to make me withdraw?" Sherrod sneered again.

"Didn't Paine give you my message? John Heath!"

"Who," demanded Parrott, "is John Heath?"

Murchell pointed to Sherrod's face, which had suddenly turned pale. "He is a gentleman of whom Sherrod is very much afraid. Parrott, did you ever hear why I came to the capital last March? I came because I heard that Sherrod here was drunk and threatening to throw himself into the river. I found

out why — he had embezzled nine hundred thousand dollars of state moneys. We fixed the matter up temporarily." He paused, straightened up in his chair, eyed Sherrod for a moment, and went on quietly, "If your name goes before the convention, I will take the floor and tell all about that transaction. I don't think you will be nominated. And, if you are, I'm quite sure you won't be elected. Do you withdraw?"

Parrott was staring open-mouthed at Sherrod, who was not good to look upon just then. "My God!" He took a step forward and caught Sherrod by the shoulder, roughly. "Mark, is that true?"

"What if it is?" Sherrod snarled. "He's only bluffing. He daren't use —"

"You covered that ground once before," Murchell interrupted evenly. "The argument had some force at the time, because I had plans which this exposure would disturb. The circumstances are different now. I want to do just two things — nominate John Dunmeade, and put you out, clear out, of politics. John Heath will accomplish both for me, I think. And for anything else I don't care. You may believe this. Do you withdraw?"

"I do not!"

"Very well." Murchell rose to indicate that the conference was at an end.

"Come on, Parrott." Sherrod wheeled and marched toward the door. But Parrott did not follow. Instead, he dropped weakly into a chair, his glance shifting uncertainly from Murchell to the departing Sherrod and back again.

Sherrod's hand was already on the door-knob, when

he noticed Parrott's defection. He stopped, looking back.

"Come along," he repeated impatiently.

"I think," said Parrott slowly, "I'll stay here. I've had one gold brick too many."

"What!" Sherrod turned sharply and strode over to the vacillating governor. "You booby! Scared by a cheap bluff like that! Do you think he means it? He daren't use it. Here, I'll prove it to you." He whirled to face Murchell, pointing. "There is the door, Bill Murchell, and on the other side of it a half dozen reporters. Don't wait for the convention. Call 'em in. Make good your bluff, if you dare!"

For a moment the senator looked intently at the ugly, passionate face.

"Call them in, Greene," he said quietly.

Greene went to the door, opened it and beckoned to the reporters. They filed into the parlor promptly. Murchell turned to them.

"Gentlemen, I want to dictate a statement." Note-books were flashed forth and pencils poised. But Murchell did not continue, and the reporters did not look at him. Their eyes were riveted on Sherrod, upon whose face had fallen a look of unbelieving wonderment. The wonderment became fear. Beads of sweat stood out on his forehead. He shook visibly. The defiant attitude suddenly dissolved.

"Perhaps," said Murchell grimly, "Mr. Sherrod would prefer to make this statement himself."

There was an instant of painful silence. Sherrod's mouth worked as though he were trying to speak. But no sound fell.

Parrott came to his relief. "Gentlemen," he said solemnly, "Mr. Sherrod has withdrawn his candidacy."

"In favor of Dunmeade," supplemented Greene.

The reporters looked inquiringly at Senator Murchell.

He nodded. "That's the statement."

Without a single backward glance he went out of the room. Greene and the reporters followed him, leaving Sherrod and Parrott alone to get what comfort they could out of their plight and to settle certain accounts, a scene upon which we considerately draw the curtain.

In the corridor Murchell was accosted again by one of the reporters.

"Senator, I know when to stop asking questions. But I'll bet a hat that wasn't what you expected to say when you called us in."

Murchell smiled for the first time since coming to the capital.

"Then you lose, young man."

A man around whom a battle had been fought leaned on a rail fence, gazing off at the undulating line where the azure of sky curved down to meet the green of hills. He rendered no acknowledgment of the lengthening shadows other than to pull his hat down to shield his eyes from the westering sun. Near by stood a tree, but he had avoided its shade to bathe in the sunlight, as though its life-giving warmth might rekindle a burnt-out ardor. He looked out upon the hillsides wistfully, as when a man about to depart on a long journey takes leave of some familiar

and well-loved scene. He had been there most of the afternoon, in flight from the kindly but obtrusive interest of his neighbors.

A state was acclaiming him, and he was not uplifted. He had read the news of the morning and knew that at that very hour several hundred of his fellow-citizens in convention assembled were naming him to a high honor, and he took no joy in it. For the acclamation was but the schooled chorus of a tractable stage mob. And the victory was not for him, nor for the principle he had served, but for a man whom he had condemned, for an institution he believed to be wrong. He was big enough — or small enough, if you prefer — to resent being catapulted into power by the strength of another's arm, and he was honest enough to hate the means he knew must have been used. The power itself did not dazzle him, in the shadow of fear and self-distrust. And it was a shattering of his notions of just reward. Out of a weakness, a recession, a yielding, by a unique accident of circumstance he had found an advancement for which in rigorous honesty he might have striven a lifetime vainly. He could not exult. The advancement had come too late; the fiery eagerness of youth was gone. Those who have known defeat often have no zest for battle. From the new, unwon honor, he foresaw must come an added necessity for strife.

He longed not for a sword but for peace, the peace of the hills, of the growing things, of the commonplace from which once he had fled.

A sound, strange for that hour and place, slowly pierced his abstraction. He raised his head, startled, listening. It was the court-house bell. Another

joined in, and another, until all the bells of the town were ringing, their notes, mellowed by the distance, winging across the hills to a man who needed their summons more than he knew. He started hastily toward the town. Only once before within his memory had there been such a ringing of bells in New Chelsea, when fire threatened to destroy it wholly.

Then he halted suddenly, the reason for the bells dawning upon him. The iron choral was for him!

He walked slowly on.

As he rounded the foot of the knob, he heard another sound rising to mingle with the clamor of the bells — cheering voices. He had a strong desire to turn back and flee to some hiding-place in the hills, but he forced himself to march forward.

At the northernmost edge of the town he perceived a rapidly limping figure. It was Jeremy Applegate, a panting, sweating Jeremy, who, when he saw John, waved his hat and broke into the peculiar elaboration of hop-skip-and-jump that, with the peg-leg, passed for running.

"Heard you came out this way," Jeremy gasped, "an' I wanted to be first to tell you." He halted sharply, threw back head and shoulders, his hand went up in a military salute.

"Governor!"

This was anticipating the fact, but Jeremy in his exultation could see no clouds on the horizon

"The convention's over, then?"

"Nominated by acclamation at three forty-five this afternoon! I hain't felt so good since Appomattox." John, beholding the tears shining in honest Jeremy's eyes, felt the moisture rise to his own. His heart

leaped sharply; it was something to receive, even if one has not earned, such loyalty!

Down Main Street, at a speed never before approximated in their staid lives, galloped a team drawing a double-seated spring-wagon. Jeremy stumped out into the middle of the street, waving his arms to command this chariot for a triumphal entry. But the hail was not needed. The astonished steeds were pulled up as sharply as a minute earlier they had been urged to speed. From the wagon descended a silent trio whose handclasp eloquently told what awkward lips could not phrase.

"Druv into town to git the news of the convention," 'Ri explained. "They said ye'd gone out the pike, so we druv out to fetch ye in. They're waitin' for ye, consider'ble excited."

"They've found out," said Dan Criswell dryly, "all at oncet that ye're a great man."

"'Low I damned the Amurrican people a mite too soon," confessed Sykes, which caused Cranshawe and Criswell to laugh.

"Git in," commanded 'Ri. "Come right along, Jeremy."

They all climbed into the wagon, John with lips compressed as if he faced an ordeal. And indeed he did. 'Ri was quick to perceive what Jeremy in the hysteria of his joy had overlooked. His great, hairy hand fell on John's knee in a tight grip.

"I want to say something while I got the chancet. I guess there's more to this than appears to be. But I have faith in ye, John Dunmeade. I have faith that ye'll govern this state in the fear of God and the love of your fellowmen."

"Whatever ye do," supplemented Sykes, "I'll believe that."

"An' so long as we got faith in ye, ye needn't lose faith in yourself," Criswell concluded.

John did not answer. He was past speaking just then.

So, in a squeaky spring-wagon, amid a group of men whose rugged living, homespun wisdom and simple faith had not suffered from the blight of a golden age, John Dunmeade, by the irony of circumstance raised on high through a force evolved by and for that age, began his triumphal progress. And what a progress! The subtle wine of it, despite his former dejection, stole into his veins. There was no city wall to breach, but New Chelsea would cheerfully have supplied the omission, had it lain in its power.

Main Street was lined with happy crowds, called out by the bells, and to number them, if we may believe the *Globe*, would have been to take a census of the town. Unemotional men for once letting themselves go to cheer wildly one toward whom many of them had claimed the neighbor's privilege of sneering criticism and upon whom they now looked as at a stranger with sudden new respect; women with handkerchiefs aflutter; small boys as feverishly exultant as when the New Chelsea nine shut out the Plumville "leaguers." They flocked around the chariot — at imminent risk to toes from the wheels — eager to shake hands with their pale, shaken neighbor, fell in behind the wagon, debouched into the Dunmeades' front yard, sadly to the impairment of the lawn that

was Miss Roberta's pride. There they stood and cheered again and again, even after he had bowed his thanks and disappeared within the house. Then they departed to prepare for the real celebration.

Within took place another wonder, Judge Dunmeade almost forgetting the judicial dignity, slapping John on the back and exclaiming, "My son, this is a happy hour. I always knew you would make your mark."

At which Miss Roberta sniffed. But when she tried to convey her felicitations, her tongue refused the unaccustomed office and she broke away to prepare a supper that should do justice to the occasion.

"I wish," she cried to herself, "I'd learned to say nice things when I was young! I'm only an old cat with claws to scratch."

That evening Benton County made holiday.

Long before darkness had fallen a hundred and more boys were dashing madly about, waving torches and redfire under the noses of the incoming farmers' teams. A huge bonfire was lighted in the Square, a pyramid of flame that rose to the level of the treetops. Around it gathered those who had not gone to the station to meet the Plumville "special." Through the shifting, excited crowd Grocer Bellamy and Cobbler Marks wended a devious way, arm in arm, the breach of five years' standing healed — the former narrating with infinite circumstantiality to all who would listen how he had given Johnny Dunmeade his first case and what had been said by each party to that historic transaction — and Jeremy Applegate stumped jubilantly about, dispensing good

cigars with all the prodigality of campaign time. Watches were frequently consulted; the special was due at a quarter to eight.

Prompt on the hour the shriek of the locomotive announced the arrival of the train. There was an expectant pause, then a long roll of snare drums, and out upon the summer night floated the martial strains of *Marching Through Georgia*. The music grew louder, clearer. Around the corner into Main Street wheeled the drum-major, magnificent in bearskin hat, and the red jackets of the Plumville Brass Band. The baton was raised in imperious gesture, and the air changed to one that called forth a roar of delight, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home!* No one remembered another time when that song had been played.

Down Main Street they came, the wizard of the baton outdoing himself, so that to this day New Chelsea youth, speaking of a lost art, recall with awe the miracles performed that night. The big bass horns brazenly emphasized the declaration that they would "all — get — blind — drunk — when Johnny came marching home"; a promise, be it regretfully recorded, which several theretofore respectable citizens of New Chelsea generously kept ere the night had waned. After them came the Plumville Fourth Ward Marching Club, twirling red, white and blue umbrellas and smoking unanimously, their souls no whit expanded. They had marched and voted and vociferated against John Dunmeade. Now, at the command of their chieftain, they marched for him; theirs not to reason why. Followed a nondescript regiment of farmers and townsmen, politicians and

citizens, joyfully marching in honor of the man whom a few weeks before they had rejected.

Without a quiver Miss Roberta witnessed the total destruction of her velvety lawn as they gathered around the house, a close-packed throng that reached across the street and into the Square. Volley after volley of cheers rose. But when John Dunmeade appeared on the porch it was clear that all previous demonstrations had been merely a preliminary testing of vocal powers. Before the prolonged roar had subsided a young woman under a tree at the edge of the crowd discovered unashamed tears coursing down her cheeks.

John made a speech; not much of a speech, it is true, but his audience was not hypercritical. It lasted just three minutes. And then, since so memorable an occasion could not be thus summarily concluded, Judge Dunmeade was called upon for "a few words." His speech, beginning, "Half a century ago the immortal Webster stood in yonder Square," was accounted — for the last time we cite the *Globe* — a classic of old-school oratory. The judge made it evident that he attributed his son's rise to those sound principles of Republicanism early instilled in his heart and mind by a fond father. Perhaps the most enthusiastically acclaimed period was that in which he compared those two great statesmen, Daniel Webster and William Murchell, to the disadvantage of neither. He spoke for nearly an hour, but the crowd listened patiently, even applauded his sentiments so generously that a stranger might have been hard put to decide whether father or son were the hero of the hour.

When the sonorous peroration was brought to a close, the band began to play *America*. For a little a deep hush fell. Then some one — later identified as a one-legged, hysterically happy old soldier — began to sing, in a cracked, quavering voice. Something that passed beyond mere jubilation stirred. With one accord the crowd lifted up its voice and sang:

"My country, 'tis of thee. . . ."

The solemn, stately measures died away. A last cheer was given, and the famous celebration passed into history.

The band moved off, trumpeting the latest popular air and followed by the Plumville celebrants. The crowd dispersed, enthusiasm spent. The bonfire burned down, only a few cooling embers remained. Over the town settled its accustomed nocturnal quiet.

At his window John Dunmeade looked with troubled eyes up into the silent, starry night. It was ungenerous perhaps, but he could not help thinking of the lean years of defeat and discouragement. And he wondered; was the hymn still ringing in his ears the voice of an abiding passion — or hysteria?

CHAPTER XXVI

SILENCED

THE next day John's office was besieged by a stream of neighbors, calling with a new-born diffidence to say in person what they had said in mass the evening before. A few, of course, generously offered to advise him as to the conduct of his future office. No one doubted that he would receive the usual enormous Republican majority.

It was not until the middle of the afternoon that Haig found him alone.

"Well, Cato," he grinned, "they tell me they're a little exercised down Carthage way."

John smiled faintly. "Not much, I suspect. I've been thinking of Cato. I'm not even a relative. Poor Jerry Brent!"

"Great guns! You can think of him? Guess you haven't read his interview."

"Yes, I have."

They alluded to Brent's comment on the Republican convention, in which he made numerous sarcastic references to the "lofty-souled uplifter who had sold out to the gang for an office."

"It's the cry of a bitterly disappointed man. Brent's chance of a lifetime is gone. He knows he can't beat you and he's sore. I wouldn't mind it."

"I don't. I'm sorry for him. He could have beaten Sherrod, I really believe."

"Do you hear him?" Haig indignantly apostrophized the engraving of Daniel Webster. "I expected to find him strutting on air after last night. And here he is, feeling sorry for a cheap, jealous demagogue the state's well saved from. Can't you feel any elation?" he transferred his remarks to John. "It isn't often the people get up on their hind legs to yell for a man the way they did for you last night."

"I'm humanly vain, I suppose." John shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm glad to hear," Haig laughed, "it's no worse than that. I've sometimes thought you so damnably vain that you wouldn't let your little stunt of saving the nation be performed except by some way bearing your own private brand."

"I suppose that's true," said John, with surprising meekness.

"No, it isn't," Haig growled quickly. "I was talking through my hat. Look here, old man! I think I understand how you're feeling over this. You're not very happy because you think it isn't your victory, that you have it only by blackmailing a man you dislike —"

"I don't dislike Murchell — personally."

"At least, you don't approve of him politically. Down at the bottom of your heart you're a little peevish because a bit of tricking has got what your theory of fighting couldn't win. And you feel that in sacrificing, for merely personal considerations, what you conceive to be a duty to the general scheme of things, you have been weak. Well, you're right. You *have* been weak. And I'm glad — I'm durned

glad — of it. It will help you to understand that no cold, abstract ideal of duty that ignores the primitive selfish instincts in men can attract, much less impel, them. The truly good inspires no sympathy. The point of this matter is, out of your weakness has come nothing but good. The bank will eventually become a sound institution, and you — I suppose you'll admit that you'll make a better governor than Sherrod or Brent?"

"I hope so. But that has come about only through an accident over which I have had no control."

"Perhaps. But my idea of a useful man is one who knows how and is willing to take advantage of just such accidents. And I'm not sure it has been an accident. You've illustrated what I believe to be a law of life. Progress always moves along the line of least resistance. Even the pioneer works through the gaps and along the river beds, not over the mountains. And the most complicated and difficult thing in life is to steer a simple, straightforward course, because human motives are always so complex. Remember that.

"And remember another thing," he continued. "Three weeks ago this county cast you aside. Now it is yelling its fool head off for you. The American people worship the great god, Success. Keep successful. You've been promoted from a lofty-souled uplifter to a practical politician for the glory of God. Accept the promotion." He was relieved to note that John could laugh. "And here," he grinned, "endeth the reading of my last lesson. It's one thing to share my vast store of wisdom with John Dunmeade, the visionary reformer, and quite another to lecture the

next governor. Funny thing what a difference a prospective office makes in one's attitude toward a man."

John smiled absently. He was thinking, "It is an easy road to travel."

"Haig," he said abruptly, "I suppose I'm an obstinate prig. But, honestly, I'd give all I hope to possess to be able to answer you. If only they'd renominated me as district attorney! I'd earned that. Or if I could believe that the present hullabaloo were not artificially manufactured —"

He did not pursue the thought, aloud at least.

"It takes genius to make a state pull itself up by the bootstraps."

"What a pity the genius that can so mold and control public sentiment can't be directed to wholesome ends!"

"Are you sure it can't? I'm not, and I have no reason to love Murchell. Have you seen him yet? He got back this morning."

And even while Haig spoke, footsteps sounded in the outer office and there was a knock. John opened the door to admit — Murchell.

"Good afternoon!" was the latter's unsmiling greeting.

"Won't you come in and sit down?"

Murchell accepted the invitation. There was a moment of uncertainty. Then Haig reached for his hat and rose to leave.

"You needn't go on my account," Murchell answered the move. "In fact, I'd like you to stay."

Haig resumed his seat. He and John kept the silence of surprise.

But the senator recognized no occasion for constraint.

"I see," he said, glancing around, "you keep the old office just the same. I remember when your grandfather built it."

"Yes," John replied courteously; "though Aunt Roberta thinks it would be the better for a general overhauling. She has a mania for cleanliness."

"Of more sorts than one," Murchell smiled queerly. "I've noticed that. Your Aunt Roberta is a fine woman. You come of a good stock — your grandfather was a mighty smart man. He used to say —"

"That there's no man so good and none so bad that he can't be made useful?"

"Yes. And also, 'The noblest sacrifice, because the hardest, is that of the sincere man who gives up part of his ideal to secure a little of it.'"

"My grandfather," John remarked dryly, "seems to have been given to high-sounding platitudes."

"He was a man who accomplished things."

"And I am not. Is that your point?"

"Have you the right to be bitter?" Murchell asked quietly. "When a man still young has in six years so impressed himself and his ideals on seven million people that they demand him for governor, and demand with an enthusiasm I have rarely seen —"

"Manufactured by you!"

"Stimulated," Murchell corrected briefly, and continued, "— and through him are beginning to realize, even vaguely, their political responsibility, he has something to his credit, I think. A good many men who think well of themselves reach old age without accomplishing so much."

"Do you mean," John exclaimed, incredulous, "that *I* have done that?"

"Do you know any one else whom the description fits?" Murchell asked. "I don't mean that the millennium is at hand. Perfection isn't attained by one sharp, impetuous dash up the hill. It is a slow, gradual climb, with many halts and detours and truces, even retreats. It's a good thing it's so. If progress came simply and quickly, it wouldn't be worth having."

"Exactly what I have been telling him," Haig interpolated eagerly.

"Then it must be true." There was a flash of Murchell's old grim self. "I wish there were some other way."

For a few moments he seemed to forget the others' presence, as he gazed out through the window toward the sleepy Square with its dingy court-house, its listlessly swaying trees, its out-of-date cannon and brilliant flag, a scene in nowise changed since the day when he had come — with what fateful miscalculation! — to press an ardent young man into his service. John, too, remembered that former time and thought wonderingly, with a sudden new hope, on the subtle, indefinable change he felt, rather than saw, in the old man.

They waited until Murchell began again.

"I speak now as a politician, not as a philosopher. There are two ways of serving a reform. One is as the preacher, the dreamer. He is useful, because he points out the way we shall go. The other is as the constructive leader, the man who takes the forces he finds ready to hand and uses their power to change

conditions as the people are prepared for change. And he is necessary, because new systems are built on the old and the people are like children — they require coaxing and the encouragement of success. The preacher has the easier task; he has only to contend with ignorance and discouragement. The builder must suffer misunderstanding and compromise — and the temptation of power. Not many men withstand that." Infinite sadness spoke.

"You," he turned to John, "have got to decide now which you will be. You are going to hold a great office. Public office — I think you've found this out already — isn't as simple as it seems to those who haven't held it. The man who would fill it with unfailing wisdom and justice, with exact honesty — and still be useful — must be as stern and unyielding as the forces of nature, and as strong."

"And I am not that." But the bitterness was lacking now.

"No man is," Murchell said gently. "I've got you the nomination through methods you won't consider clean. I've made promises you won't like, but that you must keep, or we'll both be destroyed politically."

Without excusing or concealing a single manœuver, he narrated the story of the short campaign and the convention.

"My motives in doing this aren't important," he concluded. "You perhaps aren't justified in crediting me with worthy ones. But you can believe this — for what you desire I wish nothing but success. And I want to help you. What knowledge and influence

I have are yours, if you will accept and use them. A day may come when compromise and intrigue won't be necessary."

The shuffling of feet in the outer room gave John the excuse to leave. He was heard dismissing the visitor. But many minutes flew by before he returned.

It was little enough time for what he had to decide.

A marvel had been wrought. To Murchell had been given a new purpose. But Murchell, the workman, could never change; he was too old. His lack of respect for the people and popular impulse, the habit of judging means by the end, fixed through a lifetime, would persist. His was not the crusader's spirit, white hot, impatient of compromise, caring less for achievement than that his cause be kept unsullied. And he was the stronger man, his the greater genius. The instinct for mastery must be served. Who joined him did so as a follower, to be dominated by the leader's ideal and philosophy.

"If only I could answer him!" John cried within himself.

But his experience, silencing inspiration, had not taught him that answer.

There was but one way for him to decide. The trap of circumstance, sprung by his own weakness, held him fast. Having accepted advancement at the hands of that which he believed to be wrong, he might no longer openly fight against it. As an enemy to the machine, whose beneficiary he had become, he would be discredited, unconvincing. His only hope for usefulness lay in the proffered alliance, in Murchell's new purpose.

For a little Haig sat in the unwonted silence of embarrassment. Then he said abruptly:

"Senator Murchell, I'd like to apologize, if you will let me."

"For telling the truth? It isn't necessary."

"No, for believing my impertinent, theatric intervention responsible for your action."

"You don't believe that now?"

"I do not. And —" Haig hesitated in the masculine awkwardness before sentiment. "And I know Dunmeade can trust your offer."

"It is more important that he keep faith in himself. He can trust me. I — There are enough George Wrenns to remember."

Haig looked swiftly away, having glimpsed in what coin payment for the Wrenns and that for which they stood was being made. He wished that he had withheld his tale of the weakling. And he wondered that a golden age should bring forth one man with whom abstract right was a passion and another with the greatness of soul to begin in age to undo what a lifetime had worked, and at the force that had brought these two together.

Soon John returned. He held out his hand to William Murchell.

"I haven't the right to refuse."

He was no longer a Voice. He had passed from the wilderness to the haunts of men, where action, not preachments — achievements, not prophecy — are the currency of life.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE PRICE

WAS he weak, the theory of life and growth he accepted wrong? To this day John Dunmeade often asks the question. Sometimes he doubts. But then, looking back over what has been done and foreseeing a fuller triumph, he puts away the question. For the compact, that day struck, held. Under Murchell's tutelage he learned to compromise, to substitute craft and intrigue for the honorable, open methods he loved. But he has never lost sight of his purpose and, though there have been halts and detours and even retreats, the general direction has been forward. When his time came William Murchell died, not greatly honored by a cynical world that looked for no good thing from Nazareth, but content in the belief that the forces by him set in motion would in the end undo his evil. As for Dunmeade, he is still a compromiser, but still fighting, an able lieutenant in a new movement whose end is not yet. He is glad to believe that upon his foundation other men shall be able to build with clean hands.

But he draws no moral from his story.

And he found one source of happiness over which no cloud has hovered.

When Murchell and Haig left him that afternoon, to escape kindly intruders he went out into the coun-

try. He took a circuitous route that avoided Main Street and brought him to the bridge at the confluence. He crossed it and tramped slowly along the dusty road, flanked by a riot of ragweed, wild rose and tufts of wind-sown grain, between cool, damp wood-lots and acres of clean young corn and oat-fields that rippled and tossed under the breeze. It was the time of day when the farm bells were calling the laborers to supper. Their minor resonance seemed to him the echo of the jubilant clamor of the day before. He thrilled, as he had not on that yesterday.

At first he walked slowly, sluggishly. But gradually his step lengthened, quickened, until he was striding along with a springiness he had not known for years, his head uplifted as though, the problem answered, a burden had rolled from his shoulders. He drank in the beauty around him, an inspiriting draught, and pondered — not eagerly as at another time, but steadily and with mounting courage — the task ahead of him. He heard again the thunder of his neighbors' cheers and, listening, he caught a note that had eluded him the night before but that now rebucklered his faith. He thought of the power of Murchell, pieced together by a lifetime of selfish effort and rising out of the ashes of defeat stronger than ever — to what end, if not for this hour? And who was he, to examine carpingly and throw aside the weapons the life-force placed in his hand? As the prophet blessed the murderous sword of the Israelites, so might an unclean instrument be consecrated by its ultimate service. As the earth brought forth her fruits abundantly, so might the earthy passions and desires of men be made to yield a glorious harvest.

Once he halted, asking himself sharply, "Have I gone down hill? I said it was an easy road to travel."

Then he left the doubt behind him. The die was cast. He accepted the service assigned him. He thought he discerned a purpose higher than his own. The power against which he had fought existed, would exist until the people whose condition had called it into being outgrew it. Surely better that it serve, however unwillingly, than that it continue to thwart, the higher purpose!

He walked for two miles or more and then, turning, went swiftly homeward.

But as he skirted the foot of the knob, he was brought to an abrupt halt. For there, tethered to a bush stood a horse that he recognized — Crusader, less fiery than of yore, but sleek as ever and with many a fast gallop left in his sturdy muscles.

For a moment John looked, hesitant, at the path up which she doubtless had climbed. Then in sudden resolution he went up.

She was standing by the big boulder, looking away at the hills that rose, rank upon rank, until the last, become mountains, were lost in the blue haze. But he saw not the hills, only her, the strong, supple figure limned against the sky, her hair red-gold under the slanting sunshine. He caught his breath at sight of her, sense of all else obliterated.

She seemed to feel his nearness, and turned. For an instant, without greeting, they looked at each other, these two whose romance was almost as old as life itself. But to them it was unique, all their own. To him the love had been one ardor that had not burned out in the years of failure. To her it had been a

growing thing that could not be killed, reaching out its tendrils until it possessed her wholly, casting out vanity and fear, making her his through weakness and strength, in victory and defeat. Shaken, they looked away quickly; on the face of each had been written what the other most desired to see.

She waited for him to speak. But the tongue that had held thousands silent under its spell stubbornly refused to be eloquent at this supreme moment.

"I saw Crusader," he said lamely, "and I came up."

"Obviously!" She laughed nervously. "I came up here because it is the highest point in the county — but, of course, you know that — and you can see so far. It gives one a faint idea of the immensity of things and of one's own insignificance. It is very good for the soul, I assure you. I needed it, feeling so important because I had been working —"

"Working!"

"Does the notion seem so absurd?" She tossed her head girlishly. "*I* think it fine. I didn't know time could pass so quickly and happily. Only my task was very simple and unimportant, I fear, helping father straighten out some of his papers. This morning, you know, he turned the bank over to the new cashier, and to-morrow he becomes manager of the coal company. Our affairs are all settled. The Ridge house is sold and next week we move into the old one. We are to live here always. It seems like coming home.

"See!" she went on breathlessly, as though to hold back the flood of words that she knew was gathering on his lips. She held up a hand, two pink finger-

tips of which were sadly ink-stained. "My badge of honor! It isn't very tidy, is it? But then I had to hurry into my riding things. We workers haven't time to make elaborate toilets — You aren't listening!"

"Katherine!"

And she who, unasked, had twice dared to avow her love now trembled violently before that of which she was not afraid. While she was looking at the hills, before he came, she had been doubting — a last faint doubt raised by words of his own. But his coming had banished that. She held her eyes bravely to his.

"That Sunday I said you couldn't love a man who had been weak — even for your sake. It isn't true, is it?" His voice was hoarse with anxiety.

"Are you sure you want me, in spite —"

"In spite of everything, I want you above all things else."

"Ah! no. It can't — it mustn't — be that. You are not your own. And I can be content with much less than first place —"

He would have taken her in his arms, but she held him off, even while quivering with the longing to be caught, as once before he had held her, in a rough, close embrace.

"Are you sure I'd not be a drag, a continual reminder of something you'd rather forget? And that I could help you? I — I'd have to help —"

"Once I wanted you — now I need you. I have just been asking, have I gone down hill? I do not know. But if I have, I need you who can understand —"

Then she knew of a certainty that the doubt was gone for ever. With love's keen perception she saw that already from him had gone a little of that fine beauty and courage of manhood which had been before her during the years of separation, but which the dreamer must lose to become a "practical man." But her love rose strongest when the need of it was greatest. In quick desire to shield his loss from him she stretched forth her hands to meet his.

"Ah! I will always understand. I do not believe you have gone down. But — if you have — let us go back up hill — together!"

And a little later, "I have not congratulated you yet!" she cried.

"Do you think I am to be congratulated?"

She perceived his lingering doubt and hastened to dispel its shadow.

"I was glad — glad! I stood at the edge of the crowd — I couldn't shout — but I could cry. I believe — I am crying now — please let me."

Tears of joy do not last long.

The sun sank behind the hills, leaving a sky of rose that swiftly changed to the crimson of conflict, a prophecy. The breeze died down. The leaves hung motionless on the trees. Over the face of the earth rested the deep hush of sundown.

"Listen!"

She, too, in awe, thought she heard the voice — another prophecy — the eternal Force, bringing forth weed and flower and fruit, immutable, ever victorious.

THE END